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SALAR
DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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India overtakes Japan as 4th largest economy: Govt

Says India will also overtake Germany soon

NEW DELHI, 30 DEC

India has overtaken Japan to become the world's fourth-largest economy, with a GDP of USD 4.18 trillion, and is projected to surpass Germany to claim third place by 2030, New Delhi said. With robust growth, India is also the fastest-growing major economy globally.

India's real GDP expanded 8.2 per cent in Q2 of 2025-26, up from 7.8 per cent in Q1 and 7.4 per cent in Q4 of the previous fiscal.

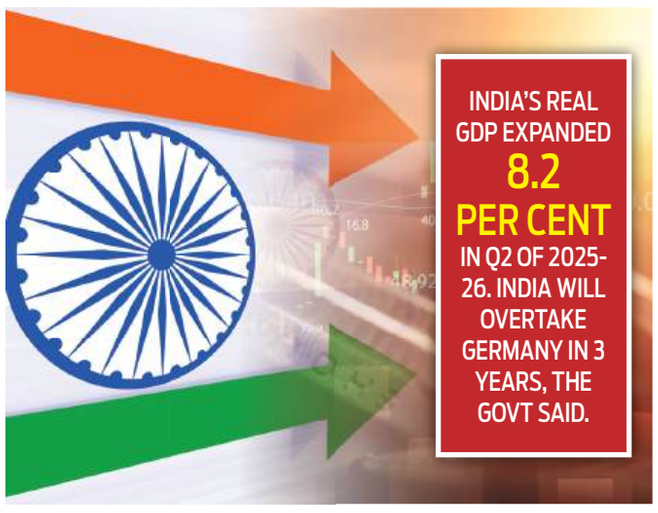
A government release cited domestic drivers, led by private consumption, as key to sustaining this momentum amid global trade uncertainties.

"India has surpassed Japan and is poised to displace Germany from the third rank in the next 2.5 to 3 years, with a projected GDP of USD 7.3 trillion by 2030," the release said.

International agencies have echoed optimism. The World Bank projects 6.5 per cent growth in 2026; Moody's expects 6.4 per cent in 2026 and 6.5 per cent in 2027; the IMF raised forecasts to 6.6 per cent in 2025 and 6.2 per cent in 2026; the OECD, S&P, ADB, and Fitch have also upgraded projections citing strong consumer demand.

The government highlighted that inflation remains low, unemployment is declining, export performance is improving, credit flows remain robust, and urban consumption is strengthening.

"India is well-positioned to sustain this momentum and achieve high middle-income status by 2047," the statement said. *—PTI*



Modi 'concerned' about drone attack on Putin's home

NEW DELHI, 30 DEC

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday voiced "deep concern" over the reports of the targeting of the residence of Russian President Vladimir Putin and urged Russia and Ukraine to focus on diplomatic efforts to end hostilities. "Deeply concerned by reports of the targeting of the residence of the President of the Russian Federation," Modi said in a post on X. Russia claimed on Monday that 91 long-range Ukrainian drones attempted to attack Putin's country residence in the Novgorod, north of Moscow. Modi said the ongoing diplomatic efforts offer the most viable path toward ending hostilities. *—PTI*

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Andhra forms two new districts, total rises to 28

AMARAVATI, 30 DEC

The Andhra Pradesh government on Tuesday issued a notification on district reorganisation, increasing the total number of districts in the state from 26 to 28. As per the GO, Polavaram district has been formed with Rampachodavaram as its headquarters, while Markapuram district has been created with Markapuram as its centre. "The orders on district reorganisation will come into effect from 31 December," the government order said. Along with the creation of new districts, five new revenue divisions have been formed across the state. The state cabinet on Monday approved the creation of the new districts and revenue divisions. *—PTI*

Address leadership row: DKS' New Year resolution

BENGALURU, 31 DEC

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar expressed confidence in the Congress party's prospects, asserting it will govern for the next seven and a half years. Speaking to reporters, he shared his New Year's resolution: "Keep you all happy and provide a prosperous administration with fresh thinking." When questioned about his potential leadership in 2026, Shivakumar stated, "I will speak in 2026." He dismissed Congress MLA Iqbal Hussain's claims of a "200 per cent chance" of his becoming Chief Minister soon, commenting, "He might be saying such things, fearing that people in would beat him." *—PTI*

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SIT formed to probe Tripura student's murder

DEHRADUN, 30 DEC

Dehradun Police has constituted an SIT to investigate the killing of the Tripura student Anjel Chakma here, even as they said the probe so far has found no evidence of racial abuse. In a press conference, Dehradun SSP Ajay Singh said police are very close to apprehending the man who allegedly stabbed Anjel in Nepal. "The complete truth behind the incident will only be known after the arrest of the main accused (Yagyraj) Awasthi, who stabbed Angel," he said. An SIT has been constituted under the leadership of an officer of the rank of Circle Officer. He said that the investigation conducted so far has been transferred to the SIT. *—PTI*

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EC extends SIR deadline in UP

LUCKNOW/ GUWAHATI, 30 DEC

The Election Commission has revised the schedule for the Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls in Uttar Pradesh. The draft voter list will now be published on 6 January 2026, and the final list on 6 March, the state's Chief Electoral Officer (CEO), Navdeep Rinwa, said in a statement on Tuesday.

Rinwa said the notice stage, disposal of claims and objections, and decisions on enumeration forms will continue from 6 January to 27 February, after which the final roll will be published

About 2.89 crore names are expected to be deleted from the pre-SIR list.

1.35% INCREASE IN ASSAM VOTERS

Assam has registered a 1.35 per cent increase in the number of voters as per the integrated draft electoral roll, published after the Special Revision conducted ahead of next year's assembly elections.

The draft roll reflects a total of 2,52,01,624 electors, representing a 1.35 per cent increase from the previous final roll published in January 2025, the state's CEO office said. The final electoral roll will be published on 10 February. *—PTI*

1 more Hindu man shot dead in B'desh

DHAKA, 30 DEC

A Hindu security officer, Bajendra Biswas, 40, was shot dead by a colleague in a tragic incident in Bhaluka upazila, Mymensingh. The accused, Noman Mia, has been apprehended, according to RTV Online.

The situation was confirmed by Monindra Nath, Acting Secretary General of the Bangladesh Hindu Buddah Christian Unity Council, who stated, "Yes, the incident is confirmed." The shooting occurred at Sultana Sweaters Limited factory around 6:30pm on 29 December.

Bajendra, the son of Probitra Biswas from Kadirpur village in Sylhet Sadar upazila, was reportedly injured when Noman Mia, the son of Lutfar Rahman from Baluturi Bazar in Sunamganj district, fired a shot from his shotgun while they were together. Witnesses reported that the two were sitting in a room when Noman pointed the gun at Bajendra's thigh and asked, "Shall I shoot?" before firing.

Md Abdullah Al Mamun, Additional Superintendent of Police (Finance and Administration) of Mymensingh district, confirmed Noman's arrest shortly after the incident. He added, "A thorough investigation has been launched to determine the actual cause of the incident."

Youth Congress workers burn the flag of Bangladesh, in Bhopal, Tuesday *PHOTO: PTI*

B'DESH, INDIAN ENVOY MEET

Two senior advisers of Bangladesh's interim government met the country's envoy to India on Tuesday to discuss "various issues", officials said.

Bangladesh High Commissioner to India Riaz Hamidullah reached Dhaka late Monday after receiving an urgent call, amid strained bilateral ties, according to media reports. Foreign Affairs Adviser Md Touhid Hossain and National Security Adviser Khalilur Rahman held a meeting with Hamidullah at the foreign office, officials from the foreign ministry said.

There were no details about the meet at the time of publishing, but it comes amid strained bilateral ties. *—Agencies*

India inks defence deal worth Rs 4,666 cr

NEW DELHI, 30 DEC

India's Defence Ministry on Tuesday signed contracts worth Rs 4,666 crore for the procurement of more than 4.25 lakh close quarter battle carbines and 48 heavyweight torpedoes, strengthening combat capabilities.

The ministry said contracts worth Rs 2,770 crore for battle carbines, along with accessories, were inked with Bharat Forge Ltd and PLR Systems Pvt Ltd for the Indian Army and the Indian Navy. "This... replaces legacy systems with cutting-edge indigenous technology," it said.

Separately, a contract worth about Rs 1,896 crore was signed with Italy-based WASS Submarine Systems SRL for the procurement and integration of 48 heavyweight torpedoes and associated equipment for the Navy's Kalvari class submarines.

This is expected to enhance the operational capability of the six Kalvari class submarines. Delivery of the torpedoes will begin in April 2028 and is scheduled to be completed by early 2030. *—PTI*

BHAI'S 'BATTLE OF GALWAN' STIRS TENSIONS WITH CHINA

NEW DELHI, 30 DEC

China reacted strongly to the teaser of Salman Khan's war drama 'Battle of Galwan'. Its state media claimed the film "distorted facts."

The film is based on the 2020 clashes between Indian and Chinese troops in Galwan in eastern Ladakh. A teaser of the film was released on Salman's 60th birthday on Saturday.

China's state-run newspaper, Global Times, alleges that the events portrayed in the movie "do not align with the facts." The report says "Bollywood films at most provide an entertainment-driven, emotionally charged portrayal, but no amount of cinematic exaggeration can rewrite the history".

Cinemas are an artistic expression and India does not restrict it, Indian government sources replied on Tuesday.

'CHINA MEDIATED INDIA-PAK TENSIONS'

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said "tensions between India and Pakistan" were among the list of hotspot issues "mediated" by China.

"We mediated in northern Myanmar, the Iranian nuclear issue, the tensions between Pakistan and India, the issues between Palestine and Israel, and the recent conflict between Cambodia and Thailand", Wang said.

New Delhi has inisited that the May conflict was resolved bilaterally, rejecting US' claims of third party mediation. *—PTI*

TOUCHING NEW HEIGHTS

The 'next-generation' Dhruv-NG undertook its inaugural flight at HAL in Bengaluru on Tuesday *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

7 die as bus falls into gorge in U'khand

DEHRADUN, 30 DEC

Seven people were killed and about 12 injured after a bus fell into a gorge in Uttarakhand's Almora district, police said on Tuesday.

The accident occurred in the Bhikiyasain area when the bus was en route to Ramnagar in Nainital from Dwarahat in Almora, Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Devendra Pincha said.

According to the SSP, 18 to 19 passengers were on board when the driver lost control of the vehicle, and it fell into a gorge, 6km ahead of Bhikiyasain.

Upon receiving information about the accident, the police, along with State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) teams, reached the spot and launched rescue and relief operations, he said.

A bus fell off a gorge, in Uttarakhand on Tuesday *PHOTO: X*

Six people died on the spot in the accident, while another succumbed to injuries on the way to hospital, the officer added.

SSP Pincha said 12 people, including the driver, were injured in the accident and rescued from the gorge.

Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami expressed grief over the loss of lives in the accident.

"I pray to God for the peace of the departed souls and strength to their grieving families to bear this immense loss," he added. *—PTI*

Cong names candidates for State Legislative Council polls

BENGALURU, 30 DEC

The AICC on Tuesday announced its candidates for the forthcoming elections to the Graduates' and Teachers' constituencies of the State Legislative Council, scheduled for November 2026.

According to a press release issued by AICC General Secretary KC Venugopal, Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge has approved the names of four candidates.

The party has nominated Mohan Limbikai for the West Graduates' Constituency and Shashi Hulikuntemutt for the South East Graduates' Constituency, the release said.

Sharanappa Mattur has been fielded from the North East Teachers' Constituency, while Puttanna will be the Congress candidate from the Bengaluru Teachers' Constituency, it added. *—PTI*

AFTER LONG ILLNESS

B'desh's 1st woman PM Khaleda no more

DHAKA, 30 DEC

Bangladesh's first woman prime minister Khaleda Zia, who played a major role in restoring democracy after a period of tumultuous military rule and dominated the country's politics for decades, died on Tuesday after a prolonged illness. She was 80.

"My mother is no more," Zia's elder son and Bangladesh Nationalist Party's (BNP) acting Chairman Trique Rahman said. Zia was a three-time prime minister and held the position of chairperson of BNP.

Her personal physician, Dr AZM Zahid Hossain, said she breathed her last early on Tuesday while receiving treatment at Evercare Hospital in Dhaka. Zia's family members, including her elder son Tarique Rahman, his wife Zubaida Rahman, and their daughter Zaima, were present at the hospital.

Zia's funeral will be held on Wednesday after Zohr prayers at Parliament's South Plaza and the adjoining Manik Mia Avenue.

In an address to the nation, Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus announced a three-day state mourning and a one-day general holiday. Yunus urged people to maintain discipline and order during the funeral prayers and the observance of mourning across the country.

Zia had been suffering from multiple complex and chronic health conditions, including liver and kidney complications, heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, arthritis and infection-related problems. She was hospitalised on 27 November.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said "We hope that her vision and legacy will continue to guide our partnership". *—PTI*

>>>More on Pages 5, 6

Jaishankar, Pak FM to attend Zia's funeral

Foreign dignitaries including Indian External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar will attend Zia's funeral. Jaishankar will represent India at the funeral, for which he will travel to Dhaka on Wednesday.

Toll plaza staff assaulted in Bantwal, 2 held

MANGALURU, 30 DEC

Police have apprehended two individuals related to an assault on toll plaza employees and vandalism at a toll gate in Bantwal taluk. The incident took place early on 29 December, following a complaint from Prashanth B, 25, the toll in-charge. He reported that a lorry approached the gate improperly, and the driver to pay the toll fee, attempting to break through, causing damage to the infrastructure. Toll workers Ankit and Rohit were physically assaulted when they confronted the driver and his accomplice. Additional assailants arrived in a pick-up, leading to further aggression. The Bantwal City Police have charged Bharath, 23, and Tejas, 26, under several legal provisions, and investigations continue to identify others involved. *—PTI*

1 dies as truck overturns on schoolchildren

BELAGAVI, 30 DEC

A tragic accident occurred on Tuesday morning near Harugeri in Belagavi district when a cement-laden truck overturned onto schoolchildren walking to school, killing one and seriously injuring two others. The truck, carrying cement from Kudachi to Harugeri in Raibag taluk, reportedly lost control while negotiating a bend, crushing the children. The deceased has been identified as 11-year-old Amit Kambale, a Class V student. The injured, 15-year-old Anjali Kambale and 14-year-old Avinash Kambale, were rushed to hospital for treatment. The incident falls under the Kudachi police station, and an investigation is underway to determine the cause, including whether speed, overloading, or road conditions contributed. The tragedy has shocked the local community. *—SALAR NEWS*

Mangaluru to get Vande Bharat soon: Sommana

MANGALURU, 30 DEC

The people of Mangaluru will get Vande Bharat connectivity soon, Union Railways Minister V Somanna said. Sources in the Railways said the proposed Vande Bharat train would operate between Bengaluru and Mangaluru. In a social media post on late Monday night, Somanna said, "the time is near when the Vande Bharat train will start running." Somanna also said that the 55-kilometre stretch of Ghat section between Sakaleshpura and Subrahmanya Road has been electrified as part of strengthening railway infrastructure and enhancing passenger convenience. The route is now fully ready for electric traction, enabling cleaner, faster, and more efficient operations. *—PTI*

PHOTO: FILEPHOTO

People for Animals team rescues four leopard cubs in City

BENGALURU, 30 DEC

The People For Animals Wildlife Hospital here on Tuesday rescued four leopard cubs on the outskirts of the city after they were found abandoned due to human activity. According to the PfA, its volunteers received a call in the morning about the matter and it immediately activated its Quick Rescue Team, reaching the spot in Tavarekere Hobli within 30 minutes. The area was inspected thoroughly for signs of the mother's return before the cubs were transferred for medical care. The cubs, some 5–7 days old, include three females. They were found dehydrated and were transported to PfA Wildlife Hospital where ultrasonography confirmed no internal injuries. The operation was initiated after Ravi, Dy RFO, Karnataka Forest Dept, alerted the Hospital about the cubs. *—PTI*

CM urges Modi to suspend G Ram G

In letter to PM, says it undermines federalism

Minister Madhu Bangarappa, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and DyCM DK Shivakumar release government employees' yearly calendar at Vidhana Soudha in Bengaluru on Tuesday *PHOTO: SALAR*

BENGALURU, 30 DEC

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Tuesday urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to suspend the implementation of the Viksit Bharat–Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) (VB-G RamG) Act, warning that the new law fundamentally weakens the employment guarantee framework and undermines cooperative federalism.

In a detailed letter to Modi on Tuesday, the Chief Minister expressed serious concern over the repeal of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), stating that the new legislation risks dismantling a demand-driven, rights-based entitlement that has served as a critical livelihood safety net for rural households.

"At the outset, I submit that the new law risks defeating the very intent of the original employment guarantee, a demand-driven, rights-based entitlement," the Siddaramaiah said, while acknowledging that although the new Act increases the promised guarantee from 100 to 125 days, it does not provide assured planning or central funding to back that promise.

Siddaramaiah pointed out that the VB-G RamG Act caps the union government's financial responsibility to a 'normative allocation' for notified areas of each state, with the Centre contributing only 60 per cent of that allocation in most states.

He added that it is constrained by a centrally determined funding ceiling, leaving many gram panchayats without funds despite genuine demand.

"In effect, a demand-driven regime is being converted into a supply-driven, top-down system," Siddaramaiah wrote.

He stated that this diluted the constitutional vision of decentralisation under the 73rd Amendment.

Raising alarm over the revised funding pattern, Siddaramaiah said under MGNREGA, mainstream states followed a 90:10 Centre-State sharing arrangement, while the new Act shifts this to 60:40.

This, he said, converted a statutory guarantee into "a run-of-the-mill scheme" and imposed a heavy burden on state finances already strained due to GST compensation issues and inequitable financial devolution.

The provision making states fully liable for expenditure beyond their normative allocation could leave them facing 100 per cent financial responsibility for excess demand. In such a scenario, he said, the guarantee would depend not on demand but on a State's fiscal capacity, rendering the entitlement unenforceable.

CM also criticised the requirement to pre-notify a 60-day no-work period during peak sowing and harvesting seasons. Summing up the changes, Siddaramaiah wrote that the new framework shifts the intent "from 'right to work' to 'work only if permitted'," and from year-round employment to restricted periods and locations. He said the changes would hurt the poorest sections of society. *—PTI*

'NO APPEASEMENT POLITICS'

DKS defends rehabilitation of evicted Kogilu residents

BENGALURU, 30 DEC

Children sit amid the rubble in Kogilu *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Tuesday defended the State government's decision to provide alternate housing for "genuine" individuals whose illegally constructed houses were demolished in Kogilu during a recent demolition drive. Shivakumar dismissed allegations of "appeasement politics".

BJP leaders had accused the government of engaging in "appeasement politics" as most of the demolished illegal houses reportedly belonged to Muslims.

"There is no question of any appeasement politics. No one should indulge in illegal encroachment, we are not ready to give any gifts to illegal encroachers. We will take legal action against those behind encroachment. People have given statements that money was collected from them by a few for allowing them to construct houses there," Shivakumar, who also holds the Bengaluru portfolio, said in the City.

"Some people are saying that they were given a title deed. It is being examined. Some who have come from outside have also joined in encroachment. We have documents. If their names are there genuinely in the voter list and other documents, we will rehabilitate such people," he said, adding that the government is not making an illegal thing legal, but is helping genuine homeless with proper documents.

At least 200 houses were demolished at Kogilu's Waseem Layout and Fakir Colony on 20 December, prompting Kerala CM to say that the bulldozer raj was coming to the South, after which the High Command intervened.

"If they (Kerala govt) want, let them take the people (involved in encroachment) to their state and give them what they want. They (Kerala govt) have not fulfilled what they had told the people in their state, during the time of disaster. We know how to handle our people and we'll do it," Shivakumar said. *—PTI*

DKS' 'DON'T WANT KERALITES' JAB TRIGGERS STORM

T'PURAM/ BENGALURU, 30 DEC

Kerala BJP chief Rajeev Chandrasekhar on Tuesday launched a scathing attack against DyCM DK Shivakumar, over the latter's remarks against people of Kerala amid the Kogilu encroachment eviction row.

Shivakumar, in a response to Kerala CM Pinarayi Vijayan's criticism of the eviction drive, said, "We don't want any Keralites. Let the CM do his job, we will do ours."

Hitting out, BJP leader Chandrasekhar alleged that Congress divides people on the lines of caste, geography, religion, and language.

"This Cong 'leader' is exactly what Rahul Gandhi ordered," Chandrasekhar wrote on X. "So by DK Shivakumar's standards of shameless politics, should Malayalees and Indians be saying we don't want Italians and half Italians 'interfering' in Kerala and India?"

Meanwhile, Karnataka BJP President BY Vijayendra accused the State government of doing a "U-turn" on the issue and bowing to the High Command .

He announced that the BJP would hold State wide protests on various issues against the Congress from 5 January. *—Salar News with Agencies*

FESTIVE VIBES

Devotees visit ISKCON temple to offer prayers on the occasion of Vaikunta Ekadasi in the Bengaluru city on Tuesday; Brigade road lit up ahead of the New Year celebrations *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

High Command should settle leadership row before February: HM

BENGALURU, 30 DEC

Home Minister G Parameshwara on Tuesday said that if the Congress High Command had to take any decision on the leadership issue in Karnataka, it should do so before budget preparation begins in February.

Speaking to reporters in the city, he said someone would have to prepare and present the budget, framed on assurances given to the people.

"The budget has to be presented based on the commitments we have made. It will be done," Parameshwara said, stressing the need for clarity amid speculation over a possible leadership change.

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah had last month dismissed such talk, asserting that he would present his record 17th budget next year. The Congress leadership has not made any public indication of a change.

Asked about a demonstration in Delhi during the recent Congress Working Committee meeting, where supporters demanded that he be made Chief Minister, Parameshwara said such calls were made out of affection. "How can I tell them not to say such things?" he asked.

> **The issue of leadership change has not even begun, so how can it be called a closed chapter?**
>
> -G Parameshwara, Home Minister

- "The budget has to be presented based on the commitments we have made. It will be done," Home Minister G Parameshwara said, emphasising the need for clarity amid speculation over a possible change in the leadership in the government

On reports that a group of Congress leaders met AICC general secretary KC Venugopal in Delhi seeking his elevation, he said the High Command would have all relevant information before deciding. The matter remains under discussion. *—PTI*

State panel moots closure of low-impact schemes

BENGALURU, 30 DEC

The Administrative Reforms Commission in Karnataka has recommended closing or merging low-impact State sector schemes, redeploying surplus staff to frontline services, and abolishing long-vacant posts. These proposals are part of the final report of the Karnataka Administrative Reforms Commission–2 (KARC-2), released last Wednesday.

The Commission also called for a permanent reform monitoring mechanism to ensure sustained implementation, the CMO said in a press note on Tuesday. The 10th and final report recommends rationalising nearly 2,874 Heads of Account, reallocating resources to mission-mode programmes, and aligning manpower with workload. The State government constituted KARC-2 in January 2021 to review administrative systems, with senior legislator RV Deshpande appointed chairman in January 2024.

Based on an examination of 2,874 Heads of Account using financial data from 2023–24 (Accounts), 2024–25 (Revised Estimates) and 2025–26 (Budget Estimates), the Commission found that around 1,000 heads had zero or negligible allocations or were inactive. About 280 schemes carried allocations of less than Rs 1 crore, with funding falling sharply from Rs 1,336 crore in 2023–24 to Rs 105 crore in 2025–26. The panel recommended closing, merging or consolidating such schemes, reallocating funds to high-impact programmes. *—PTI*

MINISTRY IS ANALYSING PANEL REPORT ON INDIGO DISRUPTIONS: NAIDU

BENGALURU, 30 DEC

Civil Aviation Minister Ram Mohan Naidu on Tuesday said the ministry is analysing the report submitted by the panel investigating the recent IndiGo flight disruptions.

Speaking on the sidelines of an event, he said, "The report has been submitted to the ministry. We are analysing the report, taking further comments from the DGCA, and will follow up on the action."

The inquiry committee, headed by DGCA Joint Director General Sanjay K Bramhane, was constituted on 5 December to assess the circumstances behind the airline's massive cancellations. The panel submitted its findings on Friday evening.

Earlier this month, IndiGo cancelled over 1,600 flights in a single day, followed by multiple bulk cancellations. The disruptions were linked to inadequate planning in implementing revised Flight Duty Time Limitations (FDTL) norms.

Following the disruptions, DGCA directed IndiGo to cut its winter schedule by 10 per cent and issued show-cause notices to CEO Pieter Elbers and COO Isidre Porqueras.

The 5 December DGCA order highlighted deficiencies in internal oversight, operational preparedness, and compliance planning, noting that the situation "warrants an independent examination" despite repeated prior instructions to the airline. *—PTI*

MADE BY HAL

'Dhruv NG' helicopter makes maiden flight

BENGALURU, 30 DEC

Minister Kinjarapu Ram Mohan Naidu and others during Dhruv-NG inaugural flight in Bengaluru on Tuesday *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

Marking a milestone in indigenous aerospace manufacturing, HAL's next-generation multi-role civil helicopter Dhruv NG made its maiden flight on Tuesday.

Union Civil Aviation Minister Ram Mohan Naidu flagged off the helicopter, calling it a symbol of India's growing capability.

Built by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited for the civil market, Dhruv NG features a glass cockpit, modern avionics, vibration control and enhanced safety systems. The 5.5-tonne light twin-engine helicopter, powered by twin Shakti 1H1C engines, is designed for high-altitude operations, VIP transport, air ambulance services, disaster relief, law enforcement and offshore missions.

It offers a 630 km range, 285 kmph top speed, a 6,000-metre service ceiling, endurance of three hours and 40 minutes, and a 1,000 kg internal payload.

Naidu said the flight marked a milestone in Indian aviation and praised HAL's workforce, saying the company is evolving into an organisation serving both defence and civil aviation.

The minister termed the DGCA's type certification of the Shakti engine a defining moment, noting India is now the world's third-largest domestic aviation market and that the UDAN scheme could add over 1,000 helicopters in the next decade.

HAL said Dhruv NG offers a cost-effective alternative to imported light twin-engine helicopters, with passenger comfort and a modular cabin configurable for VIP, medical or cargo roles. *—PTI*

Cong leader Adhir raises attacks on Bengalis with PM

NEW DELHI, 30 DEC

Congress leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury met Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday and raised the issue of "attacks" on Bengali-speaking people, especially in BJP-ruled states, and the problems faced by the backward Matua community in West Bengal. Chowdhury, a former Congress chief of West Bengal, requested the PM's intervention to stop such "attacks." Asked about the PM's response, Chowdhury said, "He said he is watching the situation."
On the significance of the meeting, he said, "There is no political significance. I came to Delhi a few days ago and I got a chance to meet him." —*PTI*

TMC demands BLAs' presence, halts SIR hearing

KOLKATA, 30 DEC

Trinamool Congress MLA Asit Mazumdar on Tuesday stopped SIR proceedings at the Polba Block Development Officer office in Hooghly, West Bengal, demanding the inclusion of party booth-level agents (BLAs). Mazumdar insisted on a written assurance that BLAs would not be excluded, saying the hearing could not proceed otherwise. An Election Commission official stated that BLA-2s were barred as per EC directives, but Mazumdar demanded documentary proof of the order. Following the standoff, the hearing was suspended. The incident has sparked political reactions, with opposition parties accusing the ruling party of interfering in administrative processes. On Monday, Mazumdar had similarly halted hearings at Chinsurah–Mogra block offices over the same issue.—*PTI*

PM chairs a meeting with economists

NEW DELHI, 30 DEC

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday called for mission-mode reforms across diverse sectors to sustain long-term growth to achieve the vision of Viksit Bharat by 2047. Interacting with a group of eminent economists and experts at NITI Aayog ahead of Union Budget for 2026-27, Modi also made a case for building world- class capabilities and attaining global integration. The theme of the interaction was 'Aatmanirbharta and Structural Transformation: Agenda for Viksit Bharat'. He stressed that India's policy making and budgeting must remain anchored with the vision for 2047. During the interaction, the economists shared strategic insights on enhancing productivity and competitiveness across the manufacturing and services sectors. —*PTI*

PHOTO: X

Priyanka Gandhi's son Raihan Vadra engaged

NEW DELHI, 30 DEC

Raihan Vadra, son of Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and businessman Robert Vadra, has got engaged to his longtime girlfriend Aviva Baig, sources said. The 25-year-old proposed after a seven-year relationship in the presence of both families, who have approved the match. A formal engagement ceremony is expected in Ranthambore, Rajasthan, where the families are celebrating the New Year. The wedding is likely to take place in the coming months. Members of the Gandhi family, including Rahul Gandhi, are in Ranthambore for the celebrations. The two families are said to share close ties. Raihan is a London-educated visual artist and photographer, while Aviva is an interior designer, photographer and former national-level football player. —*PTI*

Shah accuses Didi of abetting infiltrators

Says WB's demography has dangerously altered

KOLKATA, 30 DEC

Union Home Minister Amit Shah said that West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee is abetting the infiltration of Bangladeshis, which has "dangerously altered" the state's demography in the last few years.

Addressing a press conference in Kolkata on Tuesday, Shah said the people of West Bengal were anxious about infiltration, which the BJP would end after coming to power in the state with a "two-thirds majority in 2026."

He said that Assembly elections would take place in April, and the issue of "driving infiltrators out of the country" would be the key agenda.

Claiming that "a new BJP government will be formed in the state after April 15, 2026, as people have made up their minds," he announced that a "strong national grid" would be set up to end infiltration in Bengal.

"Insaan chhod dijiye, parinda bhi pur nahin maar paye, is prakar ki mazboot grid ki rachana hum karenge (forget humans, even birds won't be able to breach the grid we intend to build)," Shah said.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah during a press conference in Kolkata Tuesday. PHOTO: PTI

"Na keval ghoospet rokenge, saare ghoospetiyon ko chun chun ke Bharat ke bahar nikalne ka kaam bhi BJP ki Bangal sarkar karegi (The BJP-led government in Bengal will not only stop infiltrators, but it will also identify them one by one and drive them out of the country)," he added.

Shah alleged the Centre has not been able to complete fencing of the India-Bangladesh border as the West Bengal government is not providing land. "Mamata Banerjee blames the BSF for not stopping infiltration. I am asking her from this public platform. The WB government doesn't provide land to erect border fences. It is your government which doesn't provide land. That is why border fencing doesn't get completed," he said. "Why does it happen only in Bengal? That's because infiltration happens here under your direct monitoring, resulting in a change in the state's demography to strengthen your vote bank," he said. —*PTI*

Mamata says SIR a huge scam using AI

Asks Shah to quit over terror attacks in the nation

BANKURA, 30 DEC

Claiming that SIR was a huge "scam" being conducted with the help of Artificial Intelligence (AI), West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said her TMC will gherao the New Delhi Election Commission's office if the name of even a single legitimate voter is deleted from the rolls.

Addressing a rally in Bankura district on Tuesday, Banerjee said people were being "tortured" in the name of SIR.

"Around 60 people have died due to SIR. Elderly people are being summoned for verification hearings," he claimed.

"Whenever elections come, they promise to build a 'sonar Bangla', but people who speak Bengali are beaten up in states where the BJP rules," she claimed.

Banerjee alleged that the BJP has stationed its members at the Delhi EC office for the SIR exercise.

"They have used AI to delete 54 lakh names, falsely attributing these actions to EROs. The ERO association has sent letters saying they did not carry out this work," she said.

West Bengal Chief Minister speaks during a public meeting in Barjora, West Bengal on Tuesday PHOTO: PTI

"If someone's surname is Singh and it's written as Sinha in English, the name is removed. If your name has been removed, fill out forms 7 and 8," she said. Banerjee also expressed anguish over TMC MP Kakoli Ghosh Dastidar's son being called for the SIR hearing.

She also criticised the EC over booth-level agents of the TMC not being allowed during SIR hearings.

"Under which law is this decision being taken," she asked, adding, "Give us guidelines. I will approach the court to seek guidelines," she said.

She also described Amit Shah as a 'Dushasan' without naming him, and demanded his resignation, accusing him of failing to prevent subversive activities. Banerjee also asked Shah why WB is being blamed for infiltration when a terror attack occurred in J&K, and a blast took place in New Delhi.

Meanwhile, senior TMC leader Education Minister Bratya Basu said that the BJP would not even cross the 50-seat mark in the polls. —*PTI*

11 arrested for links with B'deshi groups

GUWAHATI, 30 DEC

Eleven people have been arrested in Assam and Tripura for alleged links with Bangladesh-based fundamentalist groups that were aiming to destabilise the Northeast, police said on Tuesday.

Addressing a press conference, Guwahati Police Commissioner Parthasarathi Mahanta said the Special Task Force (STF) made the arrests on the basis of Intelligence inputs provided by Central agencies.

"An operation was carried out last night in Barpeta, Chirang, Baksa and Darrang districts of Assam, and Tripura. We have arrested 11 jihadi elements, who were receiving orders from Bangladesh-based groups," he said.

Those arrested were members of the Imam Mahmuder Kafila (IMK) module, he said.

"Ten of them were apprehended from Assam, and one from Tripura. Their main aim was to destabilise Assam and the Northeast. They wanted to establish 'Muslim supremacy," he claimed.

Mahanta said the police teams have made a lot of seizures except arms and ammunition during the raids.

Those arrested from Assam are Nasim Uddin alias Najimuddin alias Tamim, 24, Junab Ali, 38, Afrahim Hussain, 24, Mizanur Rehman, 46, Sultan

No BJP, Sena deal for Sambhajinagar, Pune

MUMBAI, 30 DEC

The BJP and the Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena will go solo in the 15 January polls to the Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar and Pune municipal corporations, as seat-sharing talks between the two have failed.

Leaders from both parties, who are allies in the ruling Mahayuti, are now engaging in a blame game.

In Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar, Shiv Sena MLA and cabinet Minister Sanjay Shirsat claimed that the BJP snapped the tie-up due to "arrogance" stemming from its growing strength in the region.

Shirsat said his party had consistently insisted on an alliance with the BJP for the civic polls. "However, some local BJP leaders broke the alliance. We feel bad that the tie-up has ended," the Sena minister told reporters.

He alleged that despite talks with Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis resolving the deadlock over contentious seats, the issue was deliberately revived.

The BJP and the Shiv Sena on Monday reached a seat-sharing agreement to contest 137 and 90 seats in BMC polls PHOTO: ANI

Meanwhile, upset after being denied a ticket for the civic polls, a worker of the Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar-led NCP and his supporters vandalised the party's office in Nagpur on Tuesday.

Angry workers smashed televisions and windows of the NCP's office in the Ganesh Peth area after the party denied Avinash Pardikar a ticket to contest the Nagpur Municipal Corporation polls. — *PTI*

BJP fields M'rashtra Speaker Narwekar's kin for BMC polls

MUMBAI, 30 DEC

The BJP on Tuesday contradicted its stance against allotting tickets to relatives of sitting MLAs and MPs for the civic polls, by fielding three family members of Maharashtra Assembly Speaker Rahul Narwekar for the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation elections.

Rahul Narwekar, however, has defended the party's decision, citing the performance of these candidates in their wards. The BJP has fielded the Speaker's brother, former councillor Makarand Narwekar, sister-in-law Harshita Narwekar and cousin Gauravi Shivalkar-Narwekar for the BMC polls. —*PTI*

30 detained after clashes in Gujarat town

AHMEDABAD, 30 DEC

Police have detained at least 30 persons after members of two communities clashed and hurled stones at each other after an altercation over a small issue near Sanand town in Gujarat's Ahmedabad district, an official said on Tuesday.

The violence took place at Kalana village on Monday night and again on Tuesday morning, he said.

Adequate police has been deployed in the village and the situation is under control.

Police said, "When two youths from a community were passing by a village pond on their motorcycle on Monday evening, some youngsters from another community, who were sitting there, picked up a fight with the duo and asked why they were looking at them."

These youths were at loggerheads for some time over the issue of "popularity" in social media, as both the groups claimed to be more famous than the other. —*PTI*

Punjab moves resolution against G RAM G

CHANDIGARH, 30 DEC

The AAP government on Tuesday brought a resolution against the G RAM G Act in the Punjab Vidhan Sabha and accused the BJP-led Centre of trying to finish MGNREGA.

Rural Development and Panchayat Minister Tarunpreet Singh Sond tabled the resolution in the House during the one-day session of the Assembly.

Sond said that the Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin), or VB-G RAM G, Act will severely impact BPL families, Scheduled Castes and rural labourers who depend on the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) for survival.

Sond alleged that the Centre wanted to "finish" the MGNREGA, and demanded its restoration.

The resolution says the Assembly criticised the VB-G RAM G Act, which it said takes away the right to guaranteed wages/employment from poor labourers, women, and lakhs of job card-holding families of the state. It recommended that the state government take up the matter with the Centre to maintain the demand-based, rights-based and fully Centrally sponsored structure of MGNREGA.

It also sought the Centre reconsider those provisions of the VB-G RAM G Act which impose "undue financial burden" on the states and dilute the right to employment of rural labourers. —*PTI*

GOT NO CREDIT: TRUMP ON INDIA, PAK WAR TO BIBI

NEW YORK, 30 DEC

US President Donald Trump has again claimed credit for resolving the India-Pakistan conflict, asserting that he's "stopped eight wars" during a high-profile bilateral meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at Mar-a-Lago on Monday

Flanked by Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Secretary of War Pete Hegseth, and senior advisor Jared Kushner, the President expressed frustration over a perceived lack of recognition for his foreign policy. "Do I get credit for it? No... India. How about India and Pakistan? I did eight of them," Trump told the Israeli delegation.

Trump has repeated this claim over 70 times since May 2025, despite consistent denials from New Delhi. Trump maintains that a "long night" of Washington-mediated talks and the threat of trade tariffs led to a "full and immediate" ceasefire. He has since regularly taken credit for ending the conflict between the two nations. —*PTI*

BLAMES AAP FOR MISINFORMATION

Delhi govt says no teacher assigned for dog census duty

NEW DELHI, 30 DEC

Delhi Education Minister Ashish Sood on Tueasday dismissed Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) claims that teachers are being tasked with duties related to stray dogs, calling them "false" and part of a "misinformation" campaign. Addressing a press conference at the Delhi Secretariat, the education minister said AAP leaders circulated misleading posts claiming teachers were diverted to count stray dogs.

Sood challenged the party to produce any official order or circular supporting the allegation. He clarified that Directorate of Education (DoE) had only asked schools to appoint nodal officers to deal with issues related to stray dogs in the vicinity of educational institutions in compliance with a Supreme Court order, but clarified that no directions were issued for assigning any stray dog-related work to teachers.

Sood further alleged that AAP had recently made several similar claims to create administrative confusion, saying the people of Delhi had rejected the party's assertions on education and governance. He added that the government, led by Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, was working in the public interest, and alleged that this had triggered attempts to tarnish the administration's reputation through misinformation.

The apprehension surfaced among various teachers' associations that they might be deployed for the task PHOTO: ANI

- AAP MLA Sanjeev Jha, however, alleged that the BJP is not able to handle the education system in Delhi.

AAP MLA Sanjeev Jha, however, alleged that the BJP is not able to handle the education system in Delhi. Rejecting Sood's dismissal of its claim by the Delhi government, saying Sood is either "not aware of what is happening in his department, or he is spreading lies". —*PTI*

Hijab removal unacceptable: WB govt on Jadavpur row

KOLKATA, 30 DEC

The West Bengal government has taken a strong stance on the hijab-related controversy at Jadavpur University (JU). Education Minister Bratya Basu on Tuesday said the alleged removal of a student's headscarf was unacceptable and would not be tolerated. He added that prompt action would be taken to prevent a recurrence of such incidents in Bengal, underscoring the state's pluralistic, secular, and liberal traditions.

During an English semester exam on 17 December, an invigilator allegedly asked a third-year undergraduate student to partially remove a classmate's hijab to check for wireless earphones. No suspicious material was found during the check.

On Monday, JU Vice-Chancellor Chiranjib Bhattacharya constituted a three-member fact-finding committee to probe the incident, with instructions to submit its report within 30 days. Following the committee formation, Basu stated, "We will wait for the findings about the incident from the minority commission before responding," he added.

A section of faculty members, however, completely rejects the allegations, denying any Islamophobic intent. —*PTI*

Dhankhar yet to get govt home

NEW DELHI, 30 DEC

Former Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar has not been provided with an official residence five months after vacating his government accommodation, despite being entitled to one under government norms.

Dhankhar quit as vice president on July 21, the first day of the Monsoon Session this year, citing health reasons. In September, he vacated the official residence- Vice President's Enclave- and moved to a private farmhouse in south Delhi's Chhatarpur area. The farmhouse in the Gadaipur area of Chhatarpur belongs to INLD leader Abhay Chautala. On 22 August, Dhankhar wrote to the Secretary of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, formally requesting the official residence that former vice presidents are entitled to. "But so far, he has not been provided with the accommodation he is legally entitled to," a person close to him said. As a former vice president, Dhankhar is entitled to a monthly pension of Rs 2 lakh, along with a bungalow, one personal secretary, one personal secretary. —*PTI*

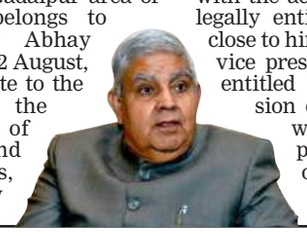


PHOTO: SCREENGRAB

Army men bicycle 1,212km for 60 yrs of Indo-Pak war

JAMMU, 30 DEC

The Army's Tiger Division has successfully conducted a 1,212km cycling expedition commemorating the diamond jubilee of the 1965 Indo-Pak war, a defence spokesperson said on Tuesday. The expedition commenced from Jammu, touched Keylong in Himachal and culminated back here after traversing diverse and challenging terrain. The expedition rigorously tested the physical endurance, mental resilience and determination of the participating troops, while reinforcing discipline, and the spirit of adventure, the statement added. Exposure to varied geographical and climatic conditions further enhanced robustness, adaptability and cohesion among the riders, spokesperson added. The expedition is a tribute to the war heroes. *—PTI*

HC orders DMRC to clear floodplains of Yamuna by March

NEW DELHI, 30 DEC

The Delhi High Court has restrained the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) from continuing to occupy the Yamuna floodplain area after 31 March, 2026. A bench of Justices Prathiba M Singh and Manmeet Pritam Singh Arora noted DMRC had not yet removed its batching plants and casting yard, despite earlier instructions on 11 December. "DMRC is granted time till 31 March for dismantling machinery and equipment. From 1 April, it is restrained from using the area," the court said, directing restoration in consultation with horticulture and forest departments. The floodplain must be cleared of debris before being handed over to the Delhi Development Authority, which must file a compliance report by 10 April. DMRC cited GRAP restrictions for delays. *—PTI*

About 170 sheep die mysteriously in Lucknow, probe on

LUCKNOW, 30 DEC

Around 170 sheep have died under mysterious circumstances near the Rashtriya Prerna Sthal in Lucknow, leading local authorities to send samples for testing to ascertain the cause of death. UP CM Yogi Adityanath, taking cognisance of the incident, has ordered a probe. Charu Khare, founder of Aasra The Helping Hands Trust, stated that the sheep's deaths occurred shortly after an event in the area and raised concerns over possible poisoning or negligence. She demanded a thorough probe, asserting, "If any laxity is found... strict action should be taken against the accused." The State government has announced compensation of Rs 10,000 per sheep. *—PTI*

Rohtas ropeway mishap: Govt to fire 2 engineers

PATNA, 30 DEC

The Bihar government has begun proceedings to suspend two engineers and blacklist the contractor after a newly-built ropeway collapsed during a trial run in Rohtas district, Bihar Road Construction Minister Dilip Kumar Jaiswal said on Tuesday. The incident occurred on 26 December when the ropeway connecting Rohtas block with Rohtasgarh Fort and Rohiteshwar Dham gave way along with an attached tower. Four trial trolleys were damaged, but no casualties were reported. "Preliminary findings reveal that the incident took place due to lack of monitoring by the officials," Jaiswal said, adding action was initiated against two BRPNNL engineers. IIT Patna experts are examining construction quality; rectification continues. The project was scheduled for completion this month, officials said. *—PTI*

Curb obscene content: Govt to online platforms

Centre tightens screws on social media, warns of strict action

NEW DELHI, 30 DEC

The Centre on Monday warned online platforms, particularly social media intermediaries, of strict legal action if they fail to curb obscene, vulgar, pornographic, paedophilic and other unlawful content.

In an advisory dated 29 December, 2025, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (Meity) directed intermediaries to immediately review their compliance frameworks and strengthen content moderation, cautioning that violations could invite prosecution under existing criminal laws.

"Intermediaries, including social media intermediaries, are reminded that they are statutorily obligated under Section 79 of the IT Act to observe due diligence as a condition for availing exemption from liability in respect of third-party information," the advisory said.

The warning follows Meity's observation that several platforms have not been acting with sufficient consistency and rigour against obscene, vulgar, inappropriate and unlawful material hosted on their services.

The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology directed intermediaries to immediately review their compliance frameworks *PHOTO: AI*

Reiterating its stance, the ministry said non-compliance with the Information Technology Act and the IT Rules, 2021, could attract action under the IT Act, the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and other applicable criminal laws against platforms, intermediaries and users.

The advisory highlighted provisions of the IT Act and the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021, which require intermediaries to make reasonable efforts to ensure users do not host, upload, publish, transmit or share content that is obscene, pornographic, paedophilic, harmful to children or otherwise unlawful.

Meity underlined the need for prompt identification, reporting and expeditious removal of such content, particularly upon receipt of actual knowledge through court orders or reasoned directions from authorised government agencies, strictly within prescribed timelines.

It also recalled that the IT Rules mandate removal of content depicting an individual in a sexual act, or impersonation thereof, within 24 hours of a complaint by the affected person. *—PTI*

Police personnel inspects the BEST bus accident site near Bhandup railway station in Mumbai *PHOTO: PTI*

Hawkers blamed for Mumbai bus crash

MUMBAI, 30 DEC

Encroachment of pavements by hawkers forced pedestrians onto the road, contributing to the fatal BEST bus accident in Mumbai's Bhandup area, an eyewitness said on Tuesday.

Four people, including three women, were killed and nine others injured when a Brihanmumbai Electric Supply and Transport (BEST) bus struck pedestrians near Bhandup railway station late on Monday night. The accident occurred between 9.35pm and 9.45pm.

"The area outside Bhandup station is always crowded. Vegetables are sold at cheaper rates, attracting more people and worsening congestion," said Saimini Mudaliyar, a pharmacist who witnessed the incident.

"I was waiting at a nearby bus stop when I heard a loud thud. People were flung away, and the bus halted a little ahead," she told PTI. Within moments, bystanders began pushing the stationary vehicle, indicating that several people were trapped underneath.

Mudaliyar said she saw blood on the road and multiple bodies. "One person's head appeared crushed, as if run over, while another suffered a severe thigh injury," she said.

She added that buses terminating at Bhandup station struggle to execute U-turns outside the railway premises because of hawkers and dense evening crowds.

Deputy Commissioner of Police Hemaraj Rajput said the victims were pedestrians returning home. He said the probe would examine all angles, including the vehicle's condition, while stressing that aiding the injured was the immediate priority. She said this was the second such BEST electric bus accident after a Kurla crash last year. *—PTI*

118 flights cancelled as fog disrupts airport ops in Delhi

NEW DELHI, 30 DEC

Dense fog disrupted air and ground conditions in the national capital on Tuesday, forcing major flight disruptions at Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport even as air quality improved marginally.

At least 118 flights were cancelled, 16 diverted and about 130 delayed at the airport, which handles around 1,300 movements daily. An official said 60 arrivals and 58 departures were called off, while flight-tracking data showed average departure delays of around 28 minutes.

In a morning post on X, Delhi International Airport Ltd said operations were continuing but cautioned that flights not compliant with CAT III norms could be affected. CAT III systems allow aircraft to land in very low visibility. Amid the fog, the civil aviation ministry directed airlines to strictly follow passenger facilitation norms, including timely updates, meals during delays, rebooking or refunds for cancellations, baggage support and grievance redressal.

Dense fog disrupted air and ground conditions in Delhi on Tuesday, forcing major flight disruptions at Delhi Airport *PHOTO: AI*

The India Meteorological Department said visibility dropped to 100 metres at Safdarjung at 7.30am, improving to 200metres an hour later, while Palam reported around 300metres by 8.30am. A yellow alert was issued till 9am, followed by an orange alert warning of very dense fog.

Delhi's Air Quality Index stood at 388, improving from Monday's severe reading of 401, though pollution remained very poor across several areas. Authorities said conditions may fluctuate with changing weather. *—PTI*

Sabarimala row: SIT quizzes CPI(M) MLA Surendran

T'PURAM, 30 DEC

A Special Investigation Team probing the Sabarimala gold loss case has questioned former Devaswom Minister and senior CPI(M) legislator Kadakampally Surendran, police sources said on Tuesday.

Surendran confirmed his statement was recorded last week, as he held the Devaswom portfolio when the alleged loss of gold from the hill shrine occurred.

The questioning followed RSP leader Shibu Baby John releasing photographs showing Surendran with Unnikrishnan Potti, the prime accused.

The SIT also questioned PS Prasanth, the immediate past president of the Travancore Devaswom Board. So far, 10 people, including two former TDB presidents, have been arrested over the loss of gold from the Dwarapalaka idols and Sreekovil doorframes. The SIT was formed on High Court directions earlier this month. *—PTI*

SC tightens timelines for oral arguments

NEW DELHI, 30 DEC

The Supreme Court has issued a standard operating procedure prescribing timelines for presenting arguments and written notes by lawyers appearing before it.

The step is aimed at improving court management and expediting the delivery of justice. CJI Surya Kant and the other SC judges came out with a circular on Monday prescribing the SOP for cases. The SOP, which comes into force immediately, says, "Senior advocates, arguing counsel and/or advocate-on-record, shall submit the timelines for making oral arguments in all post-notice and regular hearing matters, at least a day prior to the commencement of the case's hearing. The same shall be submitted to the court through the online portal for submitting appearance slips already provided to the advocate-on-record (AoR)."

It said that the arguing counsel, including senior advocates, through their AoR or nodal counsel, nominated by the bench, shall file a brief note or written not beyond five pages after serving a copy on the other side at least three days before hearing. *—PTI*

Illegal structures flagged on Sambhal graveyard

SAMBHAL, 30 DEC

The Sambhal administration on Tuesday measured a graveyard land near a disputed religious site amid tight security and identified 22 houses and shops allegedly built through encroachment, officials said.

The demarcation was conducted in Kot Purvi locality, where plot number 32/2, spread over 4,780 square metres, is recorded entirely as a graveyard in revenue records. District Magistrate Rajendra Pensiya said the exercise followed an oral complaint and a subsequent written representation.

"The land is recorded 100 per cent as a graveyard. During measurement, 22 houses and shops were found as encroachments. Notices will be issued seeking documents, after which action will be taken as per law," Pensiya said, adding that some encroachments date back 60 to 65 years.

Tehsildar Dhirendra Pratap Singh said 20 to 25 structures had been detected and a detailed inquiry was under way. "All such constructions are being identified. If replies are unsatisfactory or not legally valid, removal proceedings will be initiated," he said, adding that the role of land mafia was also being probed.

Additional SP Kuldeep Singh said heavy police deployment from 10 stations, PAC and RRF units was made. CCTV cameras, drones and social media monitoring were in place. Some residents claimed ownership and said they have documents. *—PTI*

AI Express pilot held, later gets bail

NEW DELHI, 30 DEC

Delhi Police have arrested off-duty Air India Express pilot Captain Virendra Sejwal for allegedly assaulting a passenger at IGI Airport's Terminal 1 on 19 December, an official said on Tuesday. The accused Sejwal later secured bail from the police station.

The case arose after complainant Ankit Dewan objected to airline staff allegedly jumping the security queue.

Dewan alleged Sejwal verbally abused and physically assaulted him in public, causing injuries and distressing his seven-year-old daughter, who witnessed the incident.

A CT scan reportedly confirmed a displaced fracture of Dewan's left nasal bone.

Sejwal was booked under sections 115 (voluntarily causing hurt), 126 (wrongful restraint), and 351 (criminal intimidation) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita.

CCTV footage from multiple cameras and statements from witnesses are being scrutinised to reconstruct the incident.

The police confirmed Sejwal cooperated with the investigation. Air India Express stated the pilot, who was travelling on another airline, has been removed from official duties pending an internal inquiry. *—PTI*

Kerala Court acquits all accused in ABVP murder case

ALAPPUZHA, 30 DEC

A Kerala court on Tuesday acquitted all accused, allegedly Campus Front workers, in the 13-year-old murder of ABVP activist Vishal.

The verdict was delivered by the Mavelikkara Additional Sessions Court. Calling it disappointing, the ABVP said it would challenge the order in the High Court. Prosecutors said Vishal was stabbed during a July 16, 2012 programme at an aided college in Chengannur. Twenty were charged.

The trial drew attention after SFI and KSU witnesses turned hostile.

Vishal died next day at Kottayam Medical College Hospital. Police probed initially; the Crime Branch later took over the case. *—PTI*

CANDLE MARCH PLANNED

No proof of racial abuse in Anjel's death: Cops

AGARTALA, 30 DEC

Dehradun police on Tuesday said their investigation into the death of Tripura student Anjel Chakma has so far found no evidence of racial abuse, even as the victim's family demanded the harshest punishment for the accused and a PIL in the Supreme Court sought nationwide measures against racial hate crimes.

Senior Superintendent of Police Ajay Singh said Chakma was assaulted on 9 December after tempers flared during an argument near a liquor shop in Selaqui. "Our investigation so far has found no evidence of racial discrimination or violence," Singh said, adding that no complaint of racial abuse was made between the incident and Chakma's death on 26 December, and the FIR does not mention racial bias.

SSP Ajay Singh addresses a press conference regarding the death of Tripura student Angel Chakma (inset), in Dehradun, on Tuesday *PHOTO: PTI*

Police said a birthday party hosted by one accused preceded the clash between two groups, during which Chakma and his brother Michael were injured. Chakma, a final-year MBA student, suffered fatal neck and spinal injuries and died after 17 days in hospital. Five of the six accused are in custody; two are juveniles. The sixth, Yagyraj Awasthi, a Nepalese national, is absconding, with a Rs 25,000 bounty announced.

Chakma's family has alleged a racially motivated attack, claiming the brothers were abused with slurs.

His maternal uncle, Momen Chakma, said the family wants capital punishment or life imprisonment and urged steps to prevent racial violence against people from the Northeast.

Meanwhile, a PIL filed on 28 December by lawyer Anoop Prakash Awasthi seeks guidelines recognising racial slurs as hate crimes, nodal agencies and police units. *—PTI*

Indore: 1 dead, 30+ fall ill from contaminated water

INDORE, 30 DEC

At least 32 people fell ill after suspected water contamination in Indore's Bhagirathpura locality, prompting authorities to collect drinking water samples for testing, officials said Tuesday.

A local councillor claimed an 80-year-old resident died during treatment, though the administration has not confirmed any fatality. Mayor Pushyamitra Bhargava said conclusions would be drawn only after laboratory results.

Chief Medical and Health Officer Dr Madhav Prasad Hassani said patients admitted to various hospitals complained of vomiting and diarrhoea after consuming water supplied through municipal taps. He said sample reports were expected within 48 hours.

Residents alleged the contamination involved Narmada river water supplied to homes, claiming water released on 25 December had an unusual smell and bitter taste. Councillor Kamal Baghela said one resident, Nandlal Pal, died after falling ill, while family members alleged two women also succumbed.

Chief Minister Mohan Yadav directed officials to ensure prompt and quality treatment for all patients.

Authorities said the source of contamination, including possible excess purification chemicals, would be determined after tests. Indore receives Narmada water from Jalud in Khargone through municipal pipelines. *—PTI*

Khaleda Zia: A formidable figure in Bangladesh's politics

Khaleda Zia, the first woman prime minister of Bangladesh and the second in the Muslim world, dominated the country's politics for decades alongside her arch-rival Sheikh Hasina.

Zia, the longtime chief of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and a three-time prime minister, died early Tuesday in Dhaka after a prolonged illness. She was 80.

She is admired by her supporters for her role in restoring democracy in the country following military or quasi-military rule since 1975. Zia largely dominated Bangladesh's politics in the 1990s as well as in the early 2000s.

Her political journey, spanning over four decades, was one of tremendous highs and lows: from leading a major party and governing the country to being convicted on corruption charges and later receiving a presidential pardon.

Zia's rise as a public figure is widely viewed as accidental. A decade after becoming a widow at the age of 35, she assumed the role of prime minister, but her entry into politics was not planned.

She was largely unfamiliar with the political world until she was seemingly dragged into it following the assassination of her husband, President Zia-ur-Rahman, a military strongman turned politician, in an abortive army coup on 30 May, 1981.

Before this, she was merely regarded as the wife of a general and later the First Lady. However, she quickly made her mark as the top leader of the BNP, the party her husband had founded in 1978.

She was enrolled as a primary member on 3 January, 1982. By March of the following year, she became the party's vice president, and in May 1984, BNP's Chairperson - a position she held until her death. Her main rival throughout this period was Sheikh Hasina, the chief of the Awami League.

After the 1982 military coup by the then Army chief Gen HM Ershad, Zia initiated a movement for restoring democracy.

In 1986, Ershad announced a presidential election amid simultaneous campaigns by Zia's BNP-led alliance and Hasina's Awami League-led 15-party coalition.

Both alliances initially decided to boycott the polls, but the Awami League, along with the Communist Party and other parties, eventually participated.

Zia's alliance stuck to the boycott, and Ershad placed Hasina under house arrest before the widely believed rigged March election, securing his position as president as a nominee of the Jatiya Party.

"Her (Zia's) popularity soared after she boycotted the polls in 1986," wrote Professor Howher Rizvi, who later became international affairs adviser of Hasina's government.

After the fall of the Ershad regime in December 1990, a caretaker government headed by Chief Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed conducted the elections in February 1991.

BNP emerged as the party with majority to the surprise of many who believed the Awami League would win the polls. The new parliament amended the constitution, switching to a parliamentary system from a presidential form of government, and Zia became the first woman prime minister in Bangladesh and second in the Muslim world after Pakistan's Benazir Bhutto.

BNP was re-elected to power in 1996, but the government lasted only 12 days as the Awami League staged vigorous street campaigns. Zia's government quit after introducing the caretaker government system.

Though BNP lost the fresh election in June 1996, the party won 116 seats, becoming the largest opposition in the country's history.

In 1999, Zia formed a four-party coalition and launched agitations protesting the then-ruling Awami League government. She was re-elected in 2001. In 2006, she stepped down from office, passing power to a caretaker administration.

In September 2007, she was arrested on what her party claimed were "baseless charges of corruption".

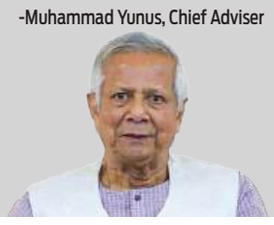
Zia's electoral popularity can be gauged by the fact that she never lost in any constituency. "She was elected in five separate parliamentary constituencies in the elections of 1991, 1996 and 2001, while in 2008, she won in all three constituencies from where she contested," a BNP leader said.

Zia was born on 15 August, 1946, to Taiyaba and Iskandar Majumdar in Dinajpur district in undivided India. Her father migrated from Jalpaiguri, where the family ran a tea business, to what was East Pakistan after the partition.

In 1960, she married Army Captain Zia-ur-Rahman, who became the president of Bangladesh.

15 AUGUST, 1946 - 30 DECEMBER, 2025

> **The nation has lost a great guardian... During Sheikh Hasina's fascist rule, Khaleda Zia stood as a symbol of struggle and resistance. Her uncompromising stance greatly inspired the nation throughout a long period of struggle**
>
> -Muhammad Yunus, Chief Adviser



> **As the first woman prime minister of Bangladesh, and for her role in the struggle to establish democracy, her contributions to the nation were significant and will be remembered**
>
> -Sheikh Hasina, ex-PM

> **To many, she was the leader of the nation, an uncompromising leader, the mother of Democracy, the mother of Bangladesh... To me, Khaleda Zia was a tender and loving mother who devoted her entire life to the country and its people**
>
> -Tarique Rahman, Zia's son

Bangladesh.

When Zia became BNP's chief in 1983, many of its leaders and supporters were uncertain about the new chairperson. Additionally, the party's ousting during the 1982 coup had left the BNP in a state of political wilderness.

She, however, consolidated the party and led it in waging a protracted campaign against the Ershad regime alongside the Awami League.

Ahead of the 2008 polls, Zia claimed to be self-educated in the affidavit attached to her nomination paper. The BNP website, however, mentions that she studied at Dinajpur Government Girls' School and Surendra Nath College.

Zia spent her last 15 years as a major opposition leader fighting what her party described as the 'autocratic' Hasina regime and also the corruption charges against her.

On 8 February, 2018, she was sentenced to five years in jail in the Zia Orphanage Trust case and later received a seven-year sentence in the Zia Charitable Trust case.

In 2024, a day after Hasina was ousted from power, Zia was granted a presidential pardon and released.

The following day, she returned to politics with a massive rally, breathing new life into the BNP despite her ailing health.

During Zia's first term as prime minister from 1991 to 1996, relations with India were a mix of normal diplomacy and tensions, particularly over water sharing of the Ganges and cross-border insurgencies.

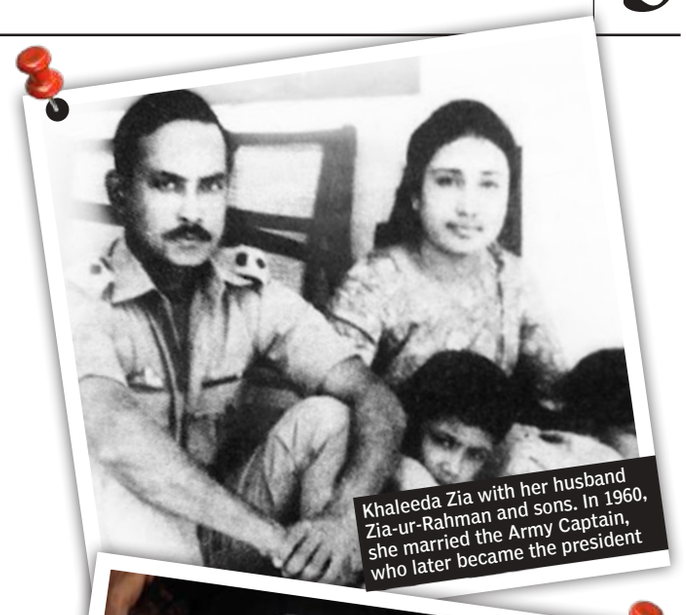
Her government adopted a "Look East" policy, signalling a strategic alignment with China and Islamic countries rather than India.

But her second tenure saw a very low ebb in bilateral ties that largely stalled connectivity and trade expansion, while New Delhi expressed strong concern over militant groups operating from Bangladesh and cross-border infiltration.

Zia, however, visited India twice as the Prime Minister in 1992 and 2006 and once as the opposition leader in 2012 at the invitation of the Indian government.

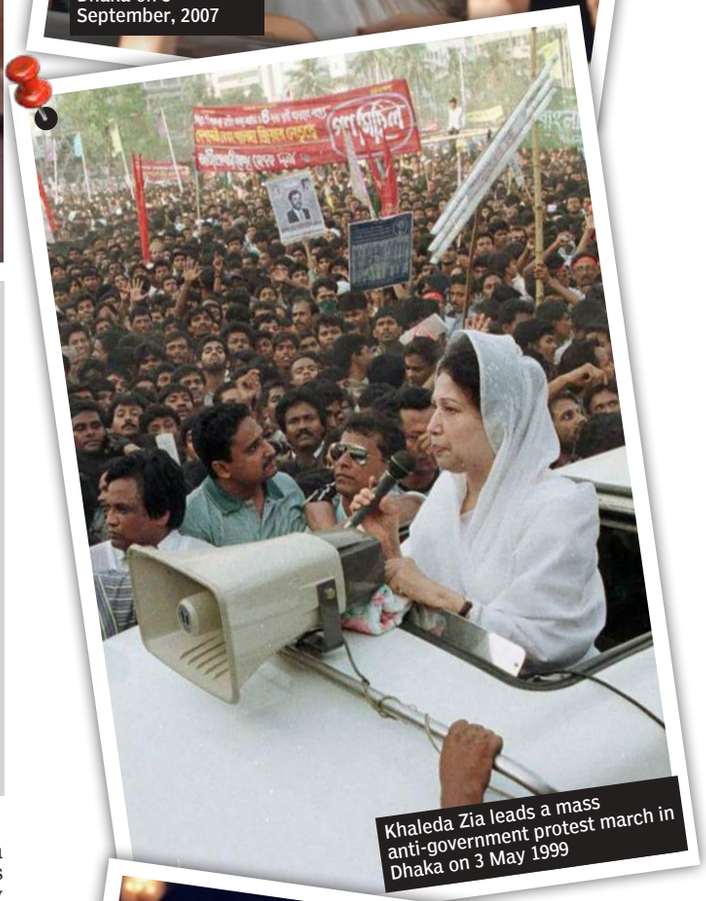
Her 2006 state visit yielded agreements on trade and security, and her 2012 visit as the opposition leader was aimed at rebuilding BNP ties with New Delhi.

Her son and heir-apparent, Tarique Rahman, who is currently BNP's acting chairman, recently returned home after living in London in self exile since 2008. —*PTI*



Khaleeda Zia with her husband Zia-ur-Rahman and sons. In 1960, she married the Army Captain, who later became the president

Khaleda Zia waves to supporters after she was arrested, in Dhaka on 3 September, 2007



Khaleda Zia leads a mass anti-government protest march in Dhaka on 3 May 1999

Sheikh Hasina and Khalida Zia together at a function in Dhaka in 1990 **PHOTOS: AGENCIES**

LETTERS

write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

After four years of rift, India and China rebuilt ties in 2025

- China is also actively pushing for the revival of the Russia, India and China (RIC) mechanism to jointly face unilateral policies being pursued by Trump to undermine globalisation. The bilateral trade, which skewed heavily in favour of China over the years, showed signs of marginal course correction with India's exports registering an increase.

India and China signed off 2025 on a positive note, trying to rebuild ties after over four years of fractious relations over the eastern Ladakh boundary conflict.

The two countries set on a long road of normalisation after agreeing to end the border face-off in October 2024, bringing to an end years of tension since the 2020 Galwan clash.

As peace prevailed at the borders, a key prerequisite for India to establish good relations with China, the two sides stepped up the dialogue process.

NSA Ajit Doval and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, the Special Representatives of India and China on the boundary question, initiated steps towards gradually improving the relations.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, during his visit to China in July, asserted that India and China should build on "good progress" in normalising the bilateral ties to address border-related issues, including de-escalation.

In August, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping met at Tianjin under the shadows of US President Donald Trump's tariff threats that set a clear direction for the relations between the two Asian giants.

Modi and Xi reaffirmed that the two countries were development partners and not rivals, and that their differences should not turn into disputes.

They emphasised the importance of "a stable relationship and cooperation" based on "mutual respect, mutual interest and mutual sensitivity" which is necessary for the growth and development of the two countries, as well as for a multipolar world and a multi-polar Asia.

As Trump doubled down on China and India with tariff hikes, Modi underlined that "India and China both pursue strategic autonomy and their relations should not be seen through a third country lens".

Xi might visit India in 2026 to take part in the BRICS summit, which was expected to further speed up the pace of normalisation.

The normalisation process began with the resumption of Indian pilgrims' visit to Kailash and Mansarovar in Tibet.

It was followed by the ease of visa procedures by both countries and the resumption of flights connecting various cities after over five years.

But impediments remained. China's active military support to Pakistan during the Operation Sindoor in May was a sharp reminder of the negative impact of China-Pakistan close ties on Beijing's relations with New Delhi.

For its part, China, whose arms exports amount to over 81 per cent of Pakistan's military hardware, sought to downplay India's Deputy Chief of Army Staff Lt General Rahul R Singh's assertion that Beijing used the conflict as a "live lab", but declined to directly answer his charge.

Gen Singh said China's strategy during Operation Sindoor was based on its ancient military strategy of "36 stratagems" and killing the adversary with a "borrowed knife" to buttress the point that Beijing extended all possible support to Pakistan to cause pain to India.

Also, the treatment meted out to Indian national Prema Thongdok from Arunachal Pradesh by the Chinese immigration officials at Shanghai airport while she was on transit to Japan evoked anger and dismay in India, especially at a time when the ties were on the mend.

Thongdok alleged that Chinese immigration detained her for 18 hours on November 21 during a transit halt after refusing to recognise her Indian passport, as her birthplace is Arunachal Pradesh.

New Delhi lodged a strong protest with China following the incident.New Delhi also said that it expects the Chinese authorities to provide assurance that Indian citizens transiting through Chinese airports will not be "selectively targeted and harassed".

China denied any ill-treatment while reiterating its claim on Arunachal Pradesh, which Delhi emphatically rejected, saying that the state remains an inalienable part of India.

The bilateral relations faced another major challenge when China blocked the export of key rare-earth metals to India, besides the US and the EU.

After several months of a squeeze on rare-earth metals over which China holds a monopoly, Beijing began clearing selective export licenses to the US following an agreement with Washington to lift curbs on semiconductor chips.

The Chinese curbs affected the manufacturing of Indian automobiles and other industries. Officials say China partially lifted curbs on India but not yet fully.

Notwithstanding the recurring bilateral tensions, India-China continues to engage in dialogue and exchanges to resolve the differences.

China is also actively pushing for the revival of the Russia, India and China (RIC) mechanism to jointly face unilateral policies being pursued by Trump to undermine globalisation.

The bilateral trade, which skewed heavily in favour of China over the years, showed signs of marginal course correction with India's exports registering an increase as Beijing showed an inclination to open up to Indian goods amid Trump's 50 per cent hike on Indian exports to the US.

Chinese Ambassador to India Xu Feihong in October said India's exports to China surged 22 per cent in the first half of FY 2025-26 vs last year.

Indian officials say the increase is very marginal and Beijing needs to open up more.

—*PTI*

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

Trains disrupted in UK-France's Channel Tunnel

LONDON, 30 DEC

A disruption in the Channel Tunnel on Tuesday prompted Eurostar to request that train customers postpone their journeys until another time. Delays and cancellations are being caused by an overhead power supply problem and a failed Le Shuttle train, the operator said. Le Shuttle trains transport vehicles between England and France. "We strongly advise all our passengers to postpone their journey to a different date," Eurostar said. "Please don't come to the station unless you already have a ticket." The disruptions come during the peak of New Year's Eve holiday travel. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Turkish police detain at least 100 IS suspects

ANKARA, 30 DEC

Turkish police carried out further large-scale operations against the Islamic State group in Istanbul and in Ankara on Tuesday, detaining more than a hundred suspects, officials said. The raids came a day after a deadly clash in the northwestern province of Yalova, where three police officers and six IS militants were killed. Eight other officers and a night guard were wounded when police stormed a house used as a hideout. Turkey has launched a series of operations against suspected IS cells in the past week, following reports that operatives were planning attacks targeting Christmas and New Year's celebrations. On Tuesday, police carried out simultaneous raids at 114 addresses across Istanbul and two other provinces. *—PTI*

Direct flights from Dhaka–Karachi to start soon

DHAKA, 30 DEC

Pakistan's High Commissioner to Bangladesh, Imran Haider, announced on Sunday that direct flights between Dhaka and Karachi are set to commence in January, heralding a significant enhancement in bilateral relations. This development follows the recent political shift in Bangladesh after the ousting of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. During a meeting with Bangladesh's Chief Advisor Muhammad Yunus, Haider highlighter a 20 per cent rise in bilateral trade and the growing interest of Bangladeshi students in studying in Pakistan, particularly in medical sciences and technology. Yunus emphasised the importance of exploring new investment avenues during Haider's tenure. *—Agencies*

UNSC condemns Israel's recognition of Somaliland

UNITED NATIONS, 30 DEC

During an emergency United Nations Security Council (UNSC) meeting, most members condemned Israel's recent recognition of Somaliland as a sovereign state. The US was the only Council member not to condemn the action, while Somalia's UN ambassador, Abu Bakr Dahir Osman, labelled it an "act of aggression", potentially enabling the forced relocation of Palestinians to Somalia. Israel's deputy ambassador, Jonathan Miller, asserted that recognition was "not a hostile step". The Arab League and other nations, including China and the UK, also opposed the recognition. The US envoy drew a comparison to recognising Palestine. *—Agencies*

Saudi bombs Yemen port, links UAE to separatists

Ties degrade over the 2 nations backing different militants

DUBAI, 30 DEC

Saudi Arabia bombed Yemen's port city of Mukalla on Tuesday over what it described as a shipment of weapons for a separatist force there that arrived from the United Arab Emirates. The kingdom later directly linked the "sisterly" UAE to the separatists Southern Transitional Council's (STC) recent advances in Yemen and warned Abu Dhabi its actions were "extremely dangerous."

The move strains ties between Riyadh and Abu Dhabi, both of which have been backing competing sides in Yemen's decadelong war against the Iranian-backed Houthi rebels.

Saudi and Emirates, while closely aligned on many issues in the Mideast, are members of the OPEC oil cartel, are also have competing for influence in the region and international business in recent years.

Yemen's anti-Houthi forces later declared a state of emergency on Tuesday, ending its cooperation with the UAE and ordering all Emirati forces within its territory to evacuate within 24 hours. It issued a 72-hour ban on all border crossings in territory they hold, as well as entries to airports and seaports, except those allowed by Saudi Arabia.

Saudi said the Emirates was shipping weapons to seperatist militants and attacked the port Mukalla in Yemen, on Tuesday *PHOTO: AGENCIES*

"The ships' crew had the disabled tracking devices aboard the vessels, and unloaded a large amount of weapons and combat vehicles in support of the STC forces," Saudi's military statement said. It said that the weapons constituted and imminent threat.

Saudi's military said two ships were targeted. It wasn't immediately clear if there were any casualties.

Emirates called for "restraint and wisdom", disputing allegations that it supported militants.

"These developments raise legitimate questions about how to deal with them and their repercussions, at a stage that requires the highest levels of coordination," Emirates foriegn ministry said.

It said that the shipments were for its military and claimed that Saudi knew about it ahead of time.

The strikes come as separatist forces have gained ground recently. The STC had pushed out forces from Mukalla affiliated with the Saudi-backed National Shield Forces. Saudi had carried out a "warning" airstrike on Friday.

Meanwhile, demonstrators have been rallying for days, calling for South Yemen, which is largely controlled by separatist forces to secede again from Yemen. Much of north Yemen is controlled by the Houthis. *—PTI*

Russia deploys nuke missiles

MOSCOW, 30 DEC

Russia's nuclear-capable Oreshnik missile system has entered active service, Russia's Ministry of Defence said Tuesday, as negotiators search for a breakthrough to end Moscow's war in Ukraine.

Troops held a brief ceremony to mark the occasion in neighbouring Belarus where the missiles have been deployed, the ministry said. It did not say how many missiles had been deployed.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said in December that Moscow will seek to extend its gains in Ukraine if Kyiv and its Western allies reject the Kremlin's demands in peace talks. Russia appears to have claimed this has happened.

After US President Donald Trump hosted Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy at his Florida resort on Sunday, Russia claimed that Kyiv sent at least 90 missiles to strike Putin's house.

Zelenskyy denied the claim but Trump said he was "very angry" with Ukraine.

Negotiators are still searching for a breakthrough on key issues, including whose forces withdraw from where and the fate of Ukraine's Russian-occupied Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant. Trump noted that the US-led negotiations could still collapse.

On Monday, Putin warned that Moscow could use the Oreshnik against Ukraine's NATO allies who've allowed Kyiv to use their longer-range missiles to strike inside Russia. Russia's missile forces chief said that the missile, which can carry conventional or nuclear warheads, can reach all of Europe. *—PTI*

Russia has deployed the Oreshnik missiles, capable of carrying nuclear warheads and striking across Europe, to Belarus *PHOTO: BELTA*

China fires rockets around Taiwan

HONG KONG/ PALM BEACH, 30 DEC

China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) conducted extensive military exercises around Taiwan, labelled "Justice Mission 2025," on Tuesday. These drills served as a demonstration of China's capacity to deter external military support for Taiwan, a self-governing island Beijing claims as part of its territory. The PLA also fired several rockets around Taiwan.

The PLA's Eastern Theatre Command deployed destroyers, frigates, and various aircraft to the waters surrounding Taiwan, executing live-fire drills that engaged long-range artillery situated in Fujian province. Command spokesperson Li Xi declared the manoeuvres had achieved their "desired effects."

Taiwan's Defence Ministry reported the detection of 130 aircraft and 14 naval vessels in the vicinity. In response, Taiwan maintained heightened military readiness. Defence Minister Wellington Koo condemned the drills as provocative, endangering regional stability.

- AChina demonstrated its ability to blockade Taiwan and showcased its capacity to cut-off external military support. Despite the Justice Mission 2025 drills raising regional tensions, Trump appeared calm

The drills sparked further animosity with Japan, which has said it could be drawn intro military involvement if China acts against Taiwan.

US President Donald Trump said that he was "not too concerned" with the drills, asserting he had a great relationship with Chinese President Xi Jinping. *—PTI*

MYANMAR MILITARY-BACKED PARTY LEADS IN ELECTION'S INITIAL PHASE

BANGKOK, 30 DEC

The political party backed by Myanmar's ruling military claimed Tuesday it won a commanding lead in the initial round of the first general election in five years, even though the state election body has not named the winners.

Voting is taking place in three phases due to ongoing armed conflicts, with the first round held Sunday in 102 of Myanmar's 330 townships. The remaining phases will take place on 11 January and 25 January, but 65 townships won't participate because of the fighting.

A senior official of the Union Solidarity and Development Party said that the party has won 88 seats of the total 102 lower house seats contested in the first phase. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to release information.

Myanmar has a two-house national legislature, totalling 664 seats. Final results are expected to be announced by late January. *—PTI*

OVER NUKE ENRICHMENTS

Trump threatens Iran & Hamas after meeting Bibi

PALM BEACH, 30 DEC

US President Donald Trump warned Iran against reconstituting its nuclear program Monday as he welcomed Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to his home in Florida. The two also discussed the implementation of Phase 2 of the Gaza ceasefire plan, while Trump threatened Hamas

Trump's warning against Iran comes after he repeatedly insisted that Tehran's nuclear capabilities were "completely and fully obliterated" by US strikes on key nuclear enrichment sites in June.

"Now I hear that Iran is trying to build up again," Trump told reporters after Netanyahu arrived at his Mar-a-Lago estate. "If they are… we'll knock the hell out of them."

Iran has insisted that it is no longer enriching uranium at any site in the country. But Netanyahu wanted to discuss the need to take new military action against Tehran just months after the 12-day war.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu shakes hands with US President Donald Trump at Mar-a-Lago on Monday *PHOTO: PTI*

Trump, with Netanyahu by his side, also said he wants to get to the second phase of the Gaza ceasefire deal "as quickly as we can."

"But there has to be a disarming of Hamas," Trump added. "If they don't disarm, as they agreed to do, then there will be hell to pay for them."

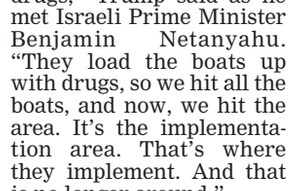
The deal stalled as both Hamas and Israel accuse each other of violation, while all but one of the 251 hostages has been released. Ran Gvili's parents are due to meet Trump. Divisions have also emerged between Arab leaders over the deployment of an international peacekeeping force during the second phase. Trump would chair the 'Board of Peace' tasked with reconstructing Gaza in the second phase. *—PTI*

Don says that Bibi's pardon is on the way; gets fact checked

Trump claimed that Israeli President Isaac Herzog was going to pardon Netanyahu, who is in the midst of a corruption trial. "He's a wartime PM who's a hero. How do you not give a pardon?" Trump said. "I spoke with Herzog. He tells me it is on its way." However, the Herzog's office debunked the claim, saying the two hadn't spoken recently.

Netanyahu gives Trump the new 'Israel Peace Prize'

Trump will be awarded Israel's highest civilian honour, the Israel Prize for Peace, Netanyahu said. This would be the first time in 80 years the award will be given to a non-Israeli citizen and the first time the Peace category has been awarded. Trump had aggressively campaigned for the Nobel Peace Prize, but didn't win it.



US CONDUCTS 1ST LAND STRIKE ON VENEZUELA

PALM BEACH, 30 DEC

President Donald Trump announced that the United States had "hit" a port in Venezuela allegedly used to load boats for drug smuggling. The strike marks the first known US land operation since the US began striking alleged drug boats in the Pacific and Caribbean

"There was a major explosion in the dock area where they load the boats up with drugs," Trump said as he met Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. "They load the boats up with drugs, so we hit all the boats, and now, we hit the area. It's the implementation area. That's where they implement. And that is no longer around."

CNN reported on Monday that the CIA carried out a drone strike earlier this month on a port facility along Venezuela's coast.

The administration says the strike was part of an anti-narcotics mission, but critics argue that it is part of a push for regime change.

Meanwhile, the US said its military carried out a strike on an alleged drug-trafficking boat in the eastern Pacific Ocean, killing two people, on Monday. At least 107 people have been killed in strikes on alleged drug boats since September. *—Agencies*

Khaleda Zia *PHOTO: PTI*

B'DESH MOURNS STALWART

Zia's funeral to be held on Wednesday

DAKHA, 30 DEC

The funeral of Bangladesh's former prime minister Khaleda Zia will be held on Wednesday and she will be buried with full state honours beside her husband, late president Ziaur Rahman, the interim government said on Tuesday.

Zia, the longtime chief of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and a three-time prime minister, died earlier in the day in Dhaka after a prolonged illness. She was 80. Her party said she passed away "just after Fajr prayer".

Her funeral will be held on Wednesday after Zohr prayers at Parliament's South Plaza and the adjoining Manik Mia Avenue, Law Advisor Asif Nazrul said.

She will later be laid to rest with full state honours beside the grave of her husband and BNP founder, at Zia Udyan in Sher-e-Bangla Nagar in Dhaka, Nazrul told reporters after a special meeting of the interim government's Advisory Council at the state guest house Jamuna.

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir attended the meeting as a special invitee.

During the mourning period, the national flag will be flown at half-mast at all government, semi-government and autonomous institutions, educational institutions and on all government and private buildings across the country, as well as at Bangladesh missions abroad.

The meeting also decided that special prayers and supplications would be organised in mosques across the country on Wednesday for the eternal peace of Zia, with similar prayers to be held at places of worship of other faiths.

Interim government Chief Advisor Muhammad Yunus said the government will provide all kinds of cooperation regarding Zia's burial and funeral.

Yunus noted that the nation had lost not just a political leader but a towering stateswoman.

Her son, Trique Rahman, said "To many, she was the leader of the nation, an uncompromising leader, the Mother of Democracy, the Mother of Bangladesh. Today, the country mourns the loss of a guiding presence that shaped its democratic aspirations." *—PTI*

People mourn the death of Bangladesh's former prime minister Khaleda Zia, in Dhaka, Bangladesh *PHOTO: PTI*

PHOTO: BLINKIT

Blinkit CFO Vipin Kapooria resigns: Sources

NEW DELHI, 30 DEC

Vipin Kapooria, Chief Financial Officer of Eternal-owned quick commerce firm Blinkit, has resigned around a year after joining the company, sources said on Tuesday. People familiar with the matter said the former Flipkart executive has "moved on" from the role. Blinkit and its parent company Eternal have not issued any official statement on the development. Kapooria's exit comes amid intensifying competition in India's e-commerce and quick commerce space, and shortly after rival Zepto filed confidential IPO papers with Sebi to raise Rs 11,000 crore. *—PTI*

Rupee rises 14P to 89.84 settle against dollar

MUMBAI, 30 DEC

On Tuesday, the rupee strengthened 14 paise to close at 89.84 against the US dollar. While strong industrial output lent support, further gains are limited by stronger US dollar, rising crude prices, and foreign fund outflows. Anil Kumar Bhansali, Head Treasury and Executive Director at Finrex Treasury Advisors LLP, attributed the increase to the RBI's intervention: "The rupee has been trading between 89.50 and 90 in the last few days, with the RBI protecting 90 for now. They will buy dollars at 89-89.20 to cover their short positions." At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 89.98 and traded in a 89.72-89.98 range before settling at 89.84 (provisional). *—PTI*

MCA extends deadline till 31 Jan for filing returns

NEW DELHI, 30 DEC

The Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) extended the filing deadline for financial statements and annual returns to 31 January 2026. In a post on X, the MCA announced a relaxation of additional fees and an extension for filing financial statements and annual returns for the financial year 2024-25 under the Companies Act, 2013. The extension, initially set for 31 December 2025, was granted for stakeholders facing filing system issues. Companies can now complete their annual filings, including e-Forms MGT-7, MGT-7A, AOC-4, AOC-4 CFS, AOC-4 NBFC (Ind AS), AOC-4 CFS NBFC (Ind AS), and AOC-4 (XBRL), without payment of additional fees, the MCA said .*—PTI*

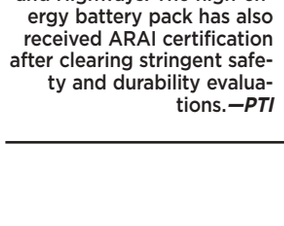


PHOTO: OLA

Ola electric's roadster X+ gets govt certification

NEW DELHI, 30 DEC

Ola Electric on Tuesday said its flagship electric motorcycle, the Roadster X+, has received government certification and deliveries will begin shortly. The 9.1 kWh model has been approved under the Central Motor Vehicle Rules by the International Center for Automotive Technology (iCAT), Manesar. With this clearance, Ola Electric said the Roadster X+ has become India's first electric motorcycle to be certified with a fully in-house developed 4680 Bharat Cell battery pack. The approval extends the use of the company's indigenous battery technology across its two-wheeler range. The certification followed rigorous safety, performance and environmental tests mandated by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways. The high-energy battery pack has also received ARAI certification after clearing stringent safety and durability evaluations.*—PTI*

Investors' wealth surges by Rs 30.2 lakh cr in 2025

Markets remained resilient despite record FPI outflows

NEW DELHI, 30 DEC

Indian equity markets delivered steady gains in 2025, adding Rs 30.20 lakh crore to investor wealth, as strong domestic participation offset persistent global and foreign investor headwinds. The benchmark BSE Sensex rose 6,556.53 points, or 8.39 per cent, during the year, hitting an all-time high of 86,159.02 on 1 December.

The market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies surged to Rs 4,72,15,483.12 crore (USD 5.25 trillion) by 29 December, up from Rs 4,41,95,106.44 crore at the end of 2024. Analysts described the year as one of consolidation after several years of double-digit returns.

Despite record foreign portfolio investor (FPI) outflows of about Rs 1.6 lakh crore (USD 18 billion), markets remained resilient, supported by strong domestic investor inflows, consistent SIP investments and a stable macroeconomic backdrop marked by healthy GDP growth. "One of the key drivers in 2025 has been robust domestic investor support," said Nitin Rao, CEO of InCred Wealth.

The market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies surged to Rs 4,72,15,483.12 crore by 29 December PHOTO: AI

Market sentiment, however, remained cautious amid muted corporate earnings growth, elevated valuations, a weakening rupee, and global uncertainties linked to geopolitics, tariffs and US Federal Reserve rate expectations, experts said. The first quarter saw a correction, followed by a gradual recovery from April, particularly in large-cap stocks.

A record number of initial public offerings also buoyed sentiment. Tata Capital's Rs 15,512 crore issue led the year's IPOs, followed by HDB Financial Services, LG Electronics India, Hexaware Technologies, Lenskart Solutions and Billionbrains Garage Ventures.

Reliance Industries remained India's most valued company with a market capitalisation of Rs 20.91 lakh crore, followed by HDFC Bank, Bharti Airtel, TCS and ICICI Bank. After gains of over 8 per cent in both 2024 and 2025, analysts said Indian equities are undergoing mean reversion, balancing long-term growth prospects with near-term global and valuation pressures. *—PTI*

'AFFORDABLE AI FOR INDIANS'

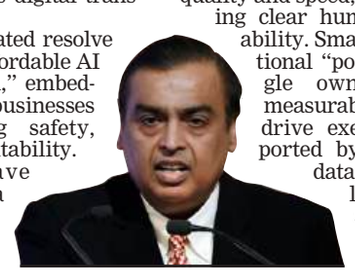
Ambani unveils AI manifesto for RIL

NEW DELHI, 30 DEC

Reliance Industries Chairman Mukesh Ambani unveiled a draft Reliance AI Manifesto, outlining an ambitious plan to transform the conglomerate into an AI-native deep-tech enterprise resulting in a ten-fold improvement in productivity for around 6 lakh employees and 10X impact on India's economy.

Calling Artificial Intelligence "the most consequential technological development in human history," Ambani said the conglomerate aims to lead India's AI revolution, just as it led the country's digital transformation.

The group's stated resolve is to deliver "Affordable AI for every Indian," embedding AI across businesses while ensuring safety, trust and accountability.



"We have embarked on a path to transform ourselves into an AI-native deep-tech company with advanced manufacturing capabilities." We have prepared a draft of the Reliance AI Manifesto. This draft is a guide to an action plan," he said.

The manifesto's Part-I focuses on internal transformation, positioning AI not as a technology project but as a new way of working. Reliance plans to reorganise operations around outcomes and end-to-end workflows, supported by common digital platforms and strong governance. AI and agentic automation will be used to eliminate repetitive work, improve decision-making and raise quality and speed, while retaining clear human accountability. Small, cross-functional "pods" with single ownership and measurable goals will drive execution, supported by continuous data, operations, , learning and automation flywheels. *—PTI*

VIA SHORT-TERM BILLS

Government to borrow ₹3.84 lakh crore in Q4

PHOTO: FREEPIK

NEW DELHI, 30 DEC

The government plans to raise Rs 3.84 lakh crore through short-term Treasury Bills (T-bills) during the fourth quarter of the current financial year, with weekly auctions spread over 12 weeks, the Finance Ministry said on Monday.

The weekly auction size will range between Rs 29,000 crore and Rs 35,000 crore. The proposed borrowing is Rs 10,000 crore lower than the Rs 3.94 lakh crore raised through Treasury Bills in the corresponding quarter of the previous financial year. I

After consultations with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), the government released the auction calendar for the quarter ending March 2026, outlining the schedule and notified amounts for short-term Government of India securities. According to the calendar issued by the Press Information Bureau, auctions will be conducted weekly in January, February and March 2026 for 91-day, 182-day and 364-day Treasury Bills.

The quarterly schedule begins with an auction on 7 January, 2026, with the issue date set for January 8. For auctions scheduled on 7, 14, 21, 28 January and 4 February, the notified amounts will remain unchanged at Rs 9,000 crore for 91-day bills, Rs 12,000 crore for 182-day bills and Rs 8,000 crore for 364-day bills, aggregating Rs 29,000 crore per auction.

Auction sizes will increase modestly from mid-February. For auctions on 11, 18 and 25 February, the notified amount for 91-day Treasury Bills will be raised to Rs 14,000 crore, while amounts for 182-day and 364-day bills will remain at Rs 12,000 crore and Rs 8,000 crore, respectively, taking the total to Rs 34,000 crore per auction.

A similar pattern will continue for auctions on 4, 11 and 18 March. *—ANI*

Mkts fall amid year-end outflows

MUMBAI, 30 DEC

On Tuesday, Indian stock markets ended lower for the fifth consecutive day, as thin year-end trading and persistent foreign fund outflows weighed on investor sentiment. BSE Sensex dipped 20.46 points to 84,675.08, despite intraday gains of over 336 points, while the NSE Nifty slipped 3.25 points to 25,938.85.

Over the past five trading days, BSE Sensex has fallen 892.4 points, or 1.04 per cent. The BSE smallcap index dropped 0.20 per cent, while the midcap index slipped 0.05 per cent. Among sectoral indices, consumer durables, IT, BSE Focused IT, realty, capital goods, and services declined, led by consumer durables and IT, both down 0.81 per cent. Metal rose the most, gaining 1.95 per cent, followed by PSU banks at 1.81 per cent, auto at 1.03 per cent, commodities at 0.65 per cent, and bankex at 0.59 per cent.

From the 30-Sensex firms, Eternal, Infosys, Asian Paints, UltraTech Cement, Bajaj Finance, HCL Tech and Titan were among the biggest laggards. However, Tata Steel, Mahindra & Mahindra, Bajaj Finserv and Axis Bank were among the biggest gainers.

PHOTO: PTI

In Asia, Hong Kong's Hang Seng rose, while South Korea's Kospi, Japan's Nikkei 225, and Shanghai's SSE Composite fell. European markets were slightly higher, and US markets ended lower on Monday. *—PTI*

After RBI's 125 bps cut, all eyes on more growth push

MUMBAI, 30 DEC

The RBI cut its key rates at four of the six monetary policy reviews of 2025 by a cumulative 1.25 per cent as inflation touched record lows, in what the newly appointed Governor Sanjay Malhotra called a "rare Goldilocks period" for the economy.

Malhotra cut the key rates right from his first policy announcement in February to support growth, and also slashed key rates by 0.50 per cent in June as it saw the space created by lower inflation.

Completing a year in office, the central banker termed it as a "rare goldilocks period" for India, with growth exceeding 8 per cent despite headwinds like the US tariffs and geopolitical changes.

He also made it clear that growth will soften going ahead, and inflation will inch up closer to the RBI's target of 4 per cent.

Amid concerns of the nominal GDP growth remaining low, Malhotra said the RBI's actions are dictated by the real GDP arrived at after subtracting inflation levels.

Actual inflation outcomes came much lower than the RBI's projections on price rise, leading to some voices of concern on the central bank's forecasting and Poonam Gupta, an academic, said there are no systemic biases in the estimation. The RBI's actions on rates, accompanied with explicit expectations of borrowing costs going down, came as a jolt for banks, which were impacted by narrowing in the net interest margins. *—PTI*

IndiGo falls 2% as it loses mkt share

NEW DELHI, 30 DEC

IndiGo shares fall nearly 2% as the airline suffered loss in market share, and hiked pilot allowance.

Shares of InterGlobe Aviation, the parent of IndiGo airline, fell nearly 2% on 30 December. At 11:45 am on 30 December, IndiGo shares were trading 1.7% lower at Rs 4,999.

The market share of IndiGo fell slightly in November, according to data from the Directorate General of Civil Aviation.

PHOTO: INDIGO

The airline will increase layover allowances to Rs 3,000 from Rs 2,000 for captains, and to Rs 1,500 from Rs 1,000 for first officers, according to an email sent to pilots by Ashim Mittra, senior vice president for flight operations Allowances for "deadheading,"a practice where airline crew travel as passengers to position themselves for future duty, will be raised to Rs 4,000 from Rs 3,000 for captains, and by Rs 500 to Rs 2,000 for first officers, the email said. For every hour beyond the 24-hour time frame, a captain will get Rs 150 from Rs 100 earlier, while the first officer will be paid Rs 75 instead of Rs 50 earlier. The night allowance per hour for a captain and a first officer has been raised to Rs 2,000 and Rs 1,000. *—PTI*

Silver recovers; jumps 4% to Rs 2.34L/kg

NEW DELHI, 30 DEC

PHOTO: FREEPIK

Silver prices rebounded strongly in futures trade on Tuesday, climbing over 4 per cent after a sharp correction triggered by heavy profit-booking from record highs. On the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX), silver futures for March 2026 delivery surged by Rs 9,590, or 4.27 per cent, to Rs 2,34,019 per kg, with 11,915 lots traded. On Monday, prices had jumped 6 per cent to an all-time high of Rs 2,54,174 per kg before falling 6.40 per cent to close at Rs 2,24,429 per kg as investors locked in gains.

Analysts said the rebound came as traders adjusted positions following the steep fall, with thin holiday liquidity amplifying price swings. Gold futures also saw firm buying on the MCX, with the February contract rising Rs 826, or 0.61 per cent, to Rs 1,35,768 per 10 grams. In overseas markets, February gold futures climbed 0.85 per cent to USD 4,380.70 an ounce. *—PTI*

India's Russian crude imports dip in December

NEW DELHI, 30 DEC

India's imports of Russian crude oil are set to register a sharp pullback in December, but the decline reflects short-term disruptions rather than a structural shift in sourcing patterns.

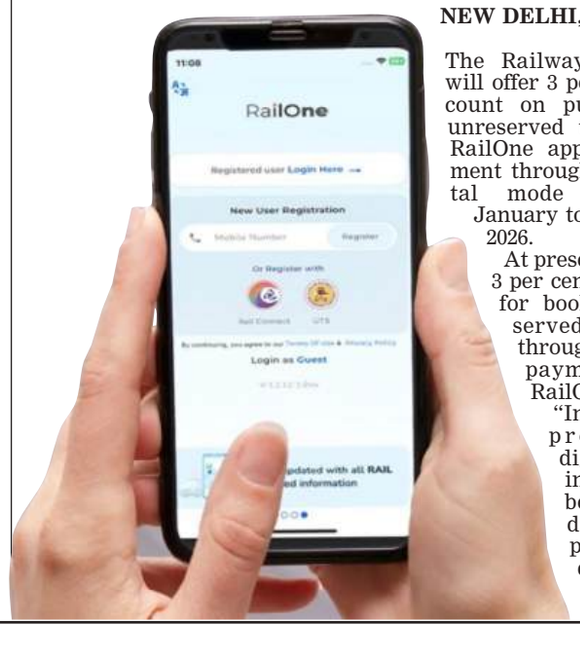
According to real-time data analytics company Kpler, Russian crude imports into India are expected to fall to around 1.2 million barrels per day (bpd) in December, down from 1.84 million bpd in November, marking the lowest level since December 2022. Indian refiners continue to buy Russian crude from non-sanctioned entities.

The drop, flagged by analysts as early as October, has been driven by disruptions resulting from US action on top Russian exporters, Rosneft and Lukoil, as well as due to the impact of EU sanctions on Russian-linked product flows.

India, the world's third-largest oil importer, became the largest buyer of discounted Russian crude after Western countries shunned Moscow following its February 2022 invasion of Ukraine. *—PTI*

RAILWAYS' DIGITAL BOOST

RailOne App users to get 3% off on tickets



NEW DELHI, 30 DEC

The Railway Ministry will offer 3 per cent discount on purchase of unreserved tickets via RailOne app and payment through any digital mode from 14 January to 14 July in 2026.

At present, it gives 3 per cent cashback for booking unreserved tickets through R-wallet payment on RailOne app.

"In order to proliferate digital booking, it has been been decided to provide the discount of 3 per cent while booking unreserved tickets through all digital payment modes on RailOne app," read a letter from the ministry on 30 December, 2026, addressed to the Centre For Railway Information System (CRIS) for making necessary changes in the software system.

"The proposal of 3 per cent discount shall be in force during the period 14.01.2026 to 14.07.2026. CRIS shall furnish the feedback of this proposal in May for further examination," it added.

The letter clarified that the existing 3 per cent cashback for bookings through R-wallet on RailOne app will continue.

"In the existing system, 3 per cent cashback is offered to prospective passengers who purchase unreserved tickets on RailOne App and make payments through R-wallet.

- "In order to proliferate digital booking, it has been been decided to provide the discount of 3 per cent while booking unreserved tickets through all digital payment modes on RailOne app," read a letter from the ministry on 30 December, 2025.

However, in the new offer, 3 per cent discount will be given to the purchasers of unreserved tickets on RailOne through all digital payment mode," a official said, clarifying that this offer is not available on any other online unreserved tickets purchase platform. *—PTI*

India to revamp method to calculate inflation

NEW DELHI, 30 DEC

India is set to revamp the methodology for calculating the Consumer Price Index (CPI) and review its inflation-targeting framework in 2026 after an extended period of low inflation driven by easing food prices and GST reductions.

Retail inflation has remained within the Reserve Bank of India's comfort band of 2–6 per cent and is expected to stay benign next year, leaving room for at least one more interest rate cut. The government's decision to cut GST on around 400 items in September further softened price pressures.

Wholesale price inflation also eased through 2025, entering deflation by June and remaining negative in subsequent months. Headline CPI declined from November 2024 and fell below the RBI's lower target of 2 per cent after June 2025, largely due to food inflation turning sharply negative.

With inflation undershooting the target, the government is reassessing the RBI's inflation mandate, with a new framework due from April 1, 2025, after the current five-year regime ends in March. The RBI has already issued a consultation paper on the issue.

The government is also finalising a new CPI series with a 2024 base year, involving changes to coverage, weights and methodology. The new index is expected to be released in February 2026.

Since February 2025, the RBI has cut the repo rate by a cumulative 125 basis points. The final monetary policy review for 2025-26 is scheduled for February 4–6, 2026. *—PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

Bradman's Baggy Green goes under the hammer

SYDNEY, 30 DEC

A rare Baggy Green cap worn by cricket legend Sir Donald Bradman during the 1947/48 series against India is set to be auctioned next month. Bradman gifted the cap to Indian all-rounder Sriranga Wasudev Sohoni during India's first international tour as an independent nation. Unlike many surviving caps from his era, it has never been publicly displayed and has remained in the family for over 75 years. The auction, opening at one Australian dollar and closing on 26 January, is expected to attract global collectors, museums, and cricket fans. Bradman scored 715 runs in the series, including three centuries and a double hundred. —*PTI*

IOA to convene National Athletes' Forum on 10 Jan

NEW DELHI, 30 DEC

The Indian Olympic Association (IOA) will hold its first National Athletes' Forum on 10 January in Ahmadabad to promote athlete-led governance and accountability in Indian sport. The Forum will bring together current and former athletes, representatives, and key stakeholders to discuss issues such as athlete rights, ethical governance, mental health, anti-doping education, grievance redressal, and career transitions, with the aim of converting feedback into actionable reforms. IOA President PT Usha said the Forum marks a historic shift, giving athletes a direct voice in policy making. MC Marykom and Sharath Kamal highlighted its role in ensuring transparency and athlete welfare. The IOA Annual General Meeting will be held on 9 January. —*PTI*

Panel flags deficits in sports administration

Recommends setting up an autonomous statutory body

NEW DELHI, 30 DEC

An Abhinav Bindra-led Task Force set up by the Sports Ministry has pointed out "systemic deficits" in India's sports administration, including "inadequate and ill-equipped" athletes for governance roles, and recommended the setting up of an autonomous statutory body to train a specialised cadre that would also include IAS officers.

The 170-page report of the Task Force has been submitted to Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya, who on Tuesday said, "all its recommendations will be implemented."

The committee has recommended that a National Council for Sports Education and Capacity Building (NCSECB) should be set up under the Ministry "to regulate, accredit, and certify sports administration training" to address the current "gaps" that ail the Sports Authority of India (SAI), the National Sports Federations (NSFs) and state departments.

Abhinav Bindra-led Task Force set up by the Sports Ministry has pointed out 'systemic deficits' in India's sports administration *PHOTO: PTI*

The nine-member Task Force was set up in August and featured, among others Adille Sumariwala and former Target Olympic Podium Scheme's CEO Cdr. Rajesh Rajagopalan.

The panel highlighted the lack of a professional cadre of sports administrators, and outdated training opportunities for them with "limited focus on competencies or continuous professional development."

It also said that most athletes are "ill-equipped" when it comes to skills needed to transition from their sporting careers into administrative roles.

"This report is both diagnostic and prescriptive. It identifies systemic gaps that constrain sports governance, but more importantly, it charts a roadmap for transformation," said Abhinav Bindra in its preface.

- The committee recommended a National Council for Sports "to regulate, accredit, and certify sports administration" training" to address the current "gaps" .

The Task Force was entrusted with a wide-ranging mandate and it included evaluation of the current administrative framework across institutions like SAI, NSFs and state associations.

Regarding the idea of broad-basing Patiala's National Institute of Sports as an academy for training sports administrators, the Task Force rejected the proposal, calling it a "restrictive and unsustainable" plan. — *PTI*

HUNT ON FOR NEW COACH

PCB parts ways with Test head coach Azhar Mahmood

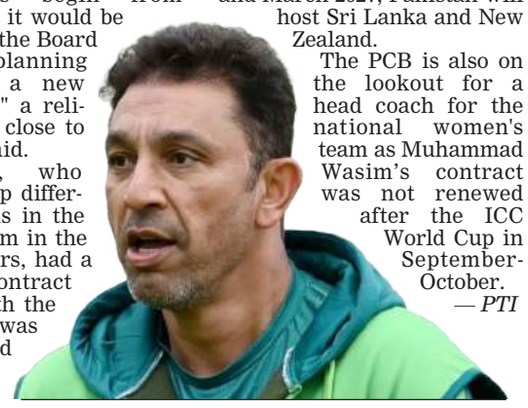
LAHORE, 30 DEC

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has parted ways with the national Test team's head coach Azhar Mahmood three months before the expiry of his contract, according to sources.

The contract of Mahmood, a former Test all-rounder, runs until March 2026 but he has been given an early release.

"Since Azhar's contract ends in March and Pakistan's Test assignments begin from March 2026, it would be the best for the Board to start planning ahead for a new head coach," a reliable source close to the Board said.

Mahmood, who has taken up different positions in the national team in the last few years, had a two-year contract running with the Board. He was named head coach of the Test side last year.



The source said that the PCB has now started the search for a new head coach of the Test side, and there could be an overhaul of the support staff as well.

Pakistan's assignments in the ICC World Test Championship start in March 2026 with a tour of Bangladesh followed by tours to West Indies in July and England in August-September.

In November-December 2026 and March 2027, Pakistan will host Sri Lanka and New Zealand.

The PCB is also on the lookout for a head coach for the national women's team as Muhammad Wasim's contract was not renewed after the ICC World Cup in September-October. — *PTI*

RCB's Perry withdraws from WPL due to personal reasons

MUMBAI, 30 DEC

Australian all-rounders Ellyse Perry of Royal Challengers Bengaluru and Annabel Sutherland on Tuesday withdrew from next month's Women's Premier League, citing personal reasons.

The WPL announced in a release that Indian all-rounder Sayali Satghare will join the RCB as a Perry's replacement, while Australian leg-spinner Alana King has been named by Delhi Capitals as the replacement for Sutherland.

"Australian all-rounders Ellyse Perry (Royal Challengers Bengaluru) and Annabel Sutherland (Delhi Capitals) have withdrawn from the upcoming edition of the league due to personal reasons," WPL stated in a release.

"RCB have named Sayali Satghare as a replacement for Perry. Satghare will join RCB at her reserve price of Rs 30 lakh. DC have named Alana King as a replacement for Sutherland.

"The Australian leg-spinner, who represented UP Warriorz in the previous season, has featured in 27 T20Is and picked up 27 wickets. King will join DC at a reserve price of Rs 60 lakh," it added.

Left-arm seamer Tara Norris has also been replaced by Australian all-rounder Charlie Knott in the UP Warriorz's camp.

Norris, who played for the Delhi Capitals in the inaugural edition of WPL in 2023, has been named in the USA squad for next year's Women's T20 World Cup qualifier to be held in Nepal.

"Knott has been signed at a reserve price of Rs 10 lakh," WPL said.

The fourth edition of the WPL will be held in two legs at Navi Mumbai and Vadodara from 9 to 5 January. —*PTI*

Archer named in England T20 WC team despite injury

LONDON, 30 DEC

Injured fast bowler Jofra Archer was on Tuesday named in England's provisional squad of 15 players for the T20 World Cup being held in India and Sri Lanka in February, despite nursing a left side strain from the third Ashes Test in Adelaide. The squad is to be captained by Harry Brook.

England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) said in a statement that Archer will, miss the white-ball tour of Sri Lanka in January, which includes three ODIs and T20Is, said

The injury had ruled Archer out of the fourth Ashes Test in Melbourne which England won by four wickets within two days.

England will open their T20 World Cup campaign against Nepal on 8 February in Mumbai, followed by matches against the West Indies (11 February in Mumbai), Bangladesh (14 February in Kolkata) and Italy (16 February in Kolkata).

Archer was one of England's standout players in the Ashes before he picked up the injury during the third Test in Adelaide, which Australia won to secure the urn. — *PTI*

BPL matches postponed after Khaleda's death

DHAKA, 30 DEC

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has called off the two BPL matches scheduled for Tuesday, following the death of former prime minister of the country Khaleda Zia this morning.

The two matches have been re-scheduled for Wednesday.

The decision to postpone the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) matches was taken just two hours before the toss of the opening match of the day between Sylhet Titans and Chattogram Royals at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium.

Zia, the first female PM of the country, served two terms -- from 1991-1996 and 2001-2006. She was the chairperson and leader of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP).

"BPL 2026 stands united in respect during the period of national mourning for Former Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Begum Khaleda Zia. Matches scheduled for 30 December 2025 have been rescheduled to 31 December 2025," the BCB said on its 'X' handle.

"All remaining Sylhet Phase matches will continue as per the original schedule."

Dhaka Capitals and Rangpur Riders were scheduled to play the second match on Tuesday. The postponement of matches is unlikely to affect the schedule of the tournament, which began on 26 December. —*PTI*

Deepti stays at No. 1 spot in ICC T20I rankings

DUBAI, 30 DEC

In the latest ICC Women's T20I Player Rankings, seasoned all-rounder Deepti Sharma continues to hold the top spot, while Indian opener Shafali Verma surged to sixth place following stellar performances in her recent matches. The 21-year-old, previously ranked at the top, moved up four spots thanks to her remarkable innings of 69 not out off 34 balls and two unbeaten scores of 79 in the second, third, and fourth T20Is against Sri Lanka.

Vice-captain Smriti Mandhana also made her mark, scoring an impressive 80 in the fourth T20I to maintain her third position in the rankings. However,

- Shafali moved up to sixth place following her innings of 69 not out off 34 balls. Deepti held her top spot, while fellow bowler, Renuka jumped eight places.

Jemimah Rodrigues fell one place, landing in tenth.

While in the bowling category, while fellow Indian bowler Renuka Singh Thakur has made significant strides, jumping eight places to a joint-sixth position after a match-winning performance of four for 21 in the third match.

Emerging talents Shree Charani and Vaishnavi Sharma also rose in the rankings, with Charani moving up 17 places to 52nd, and Sharma soaring 390 places to 124th in her debut international series. Meanwhile, Sri Lankan opener Hasini Perera advanced by 114 places to 71st rank after recent consistent performances. -*PTI*

Aus still best team in cricket: Gardner ahead of India series

SYDNEY, 30 DEC

All-rounder Ashleigh Gardner stated that Australia remains the "best team in the world" despite not currently holding T20 or ODI titles. With a series against newly-crowned ODI champions, Gardner is optimistic of Australia's chances to reclaim their dominance.

The series will feature three T20Is, three ODIs, and a Test format, marking the first encounter since India's victory in the ODI World Cup semi-final, which ended Australia's title defence.

"India obviously played some really good cricket recently." Gardner believes that familiarity with home conditions will benefit Australia while recognising the India as a growing threat.

"Over the last 12-18 months, we've only lost two games. It shows the consistency of the group," she noted. Australia was eliminated in the T20 World Cup semi-finals, leaving them without a white-ball title for the first time in over seven years. — *PTI*

Pay row threatens Pakistan FIH Pro League

LAHORE, 30 DEC

A financial dispute has emerged within the Pakistan men's hockey team, with senior players threatening to boycott the FIH Pro League's second phase in February.

The players have claimed they received only a fraction of their promised daily allowances for matches played earlier this month.

One player confirmed, "We were assured we would be paid 30,000 rupees daily allowance for the duration of the Pro League event in Argentina.

Last week, we got the daily allowances in our accounts but at the rate of just PKR 11,000, which is a sham." He further emphasised, "If you look at the exchange rates, PKR 30,000 means around USD 110, while 11,000 is just USD 40 — thats a huge difference to us."

Pakistan competed in four matches during the Pro League in Argentina but did were not able to secure any victories. With four more matches scheduled in February in Australia, players are concerned about their financial treatment.

The Pakistan Hockey Federation (PHF) has stated that the daily allowances were disbursed by the Pakistan Sports Board (PSB), which has a policy of providing a daily allowance of USD 40 for all athletes abroad. PHF Secretary Rana Mujahid explained, "The PHF policy is to pay players (PKR) 30,000 daily allowance, but since the sporting board is currently funding the entire expenses of the team for the two phases of the Pro League, we can not do much in this matter."

Pakistan qualified for the FIH Pro League after making it as runners-up in the Hockey Nations Cup in June this year. —*PTI*

ACCIDENT IN NIGERIA

Boxer Joshua 'stable' after car crash kills 2

LAGOS, 30 DEC

Anthony Joshua, the two-time former world heavyweight champion from Britain, was stable in hospital after being involved in a car crash in Nigeria that killed two people who were close friends and team members, his promoter said.

Eddie Hearn's Matchroom Boxing said on X that Joshua "sustained injuries in the accident and was taken to hospital on Monday for treatment" and he will "remain there for observation."

It named Sina Ghami and Latif Ayodele as the two passengers who had "tragically passed away."

Photos on social media showed Joshua being extricated from a wrecked vehicle while he was in pain.

"Following thorough clinical evaluations, medical professionals have confirmed that both patients (hospitalised after the accident) are stable and do not require any emergency medical intervention," a joint statement by Lagos and Ogun state governments said.

Photos on social media showed Joshua being extricated from a wrecked vehicle while he was in pain *PHOTO: SCREENGRAB*

The Lagos state commissioner for information, Gbenga Omotoso, confirmed the accident in a post on X, adding that the government had sent ambulances to the crash site.

The crash occurred on a major thoroughfare — the Lagos-Ibadan Expressway which links Ogun state to Lagos, the country's economic capital — at about 11 am local time. Nigeria is the homeland of Joshua's parents.

Ogun State Police earlier said in a statement, "The vehicle carrying Joshua, a Lexus SUV, was involved in the accident under circumstances that are being investigated. Joshua, seated in the rear of the vehicle, sustained minor injuries and is receiving medical attention at a hospital along with another injured person. — *PTI*

FIFA gets over 150 million requests for World Cup tickets

NEW DELHI, 30 DEC

FIFA President Gianni Infantino said they will make history after around 150 million ticket requests were submitted from over 200 countries for the FIFA World Cup 2026, says Goal.com.

The current ticketing phase for the FIFA World Cup 2026 has left the competition oversubscribed by more than 30 times, showcasing the higher demand among fans at this early stage.

FIFA President Gianni has described the high volume of ticket requests as an incredible demand. The FIFA President highlighted the overwhelming response from fans, which showcases how football is loved globally.

"The FIFA World Cup 2026 is set to be the greatest and most inclusive show on the planet,

with more than 150 million tickets already requested in the first 15 days, making this edition 30 times oversubscribed, a true showcase of incredible demand from fans from over 200 countries," Infantino said. "This overwhelming response from passionate fans is a true representation of how our game is loved globally," he added.

The FIFA World Cup is set to kick off on 11 June 2026, with Mexico facing South Africa in Group A at the Estadio Azteca located in Mexico City. — *ANI*